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JANUARY 15, 1996

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Cancel the State of the Union?

With congressional Republicans always on the lookout for new ways to thwart Bill Clinton, they're mulling over one shocking option: denying him the opportunity to deliver a State of the Union address. The Congress does not have to open its chamber to the president; the Constitution merely requires the chief executive to "give to the Congress information of the State of the Union," and only "from time to time" at that. The tradition of making it a yearly speech before an assembly of the House and Senate began this century, with Woodrow Wilson.

Still, a tradition is a tradition, and denying it to Clinton would be a major dis. That may not trouble GOP leaders. They say canceling the speech would send a message that Washington's business-as-usual rules no longer apply. Recent reports that the White House is planning to use the January 23 address as a vehicle to bash the GOP for its budget antics have only bolstered the resolve of those Republicans inclined to administer this rebuke. Odds are, though, that cooler heads (i.e., Bob Dole) will prevail.

On the Dole

Republicans have resolved their own disputes about welfare reform, and a strong measure is ready to be sent to the president. Clinton has announced his intention to veto it, and that fact is causing Bob Dole to hesitate. Should the Republicans force Clinton to veto this presumably popular measure and then spend all year attacking him for preventing the Congress from "ending welfare as we know it"? Or should they water down the measure so that Dole can claim he was able to shepherd welfare reform through the Congress and past the president? Dole's campaign staff wants the veto for the presidential race; Dole's Senate staff, led by the indomitable Sheila Burke, wants the legislative success. Decision time: soon.

President Forbes? (cont'd)

Things continue to break well for the once-improbable presidential candidate Steve Forbes. One private poll shows him at 17 percent in Iowa—far ahead of Gramm, Buchanan, and Alexander, who are still mired in single digits. What's more, the Forbes campaign has probably succeeded in its effort to get on the New York ballot, once thought to have been closed off by Al D'Amato to everyone but Bob Dole.

Forbes spent some $1 million to gather the 50,000-plus signatures necessary and will be the only other candidate on the ballot statewide. Together with polls showing strength in both New Hampshire and Arizona (where he's even ahead), a preliminary sketch of a Forbes victory scenario is possible:

February 12: Second in the Iowa caucuses. February 20: Second in New Hampshire. February 21: Lead story on all network newscasts. February 27: Second, or even first, in Arizona. February 29: On the cover of all three newsmagazines. March 7: Beats Dole one-on-one in New York. After which, who knows?

Parlous Parleys

For all the agony they've suffered in budget talks at President Clinton's hands, Republicans have knocked down one persistent myth: Clinton as the peerless policy wonk. It turns out that on Medicare and Medicaid and a few other budget issues, Clinton couldn't keep up with House Speaker Newt Gingrich. While Gingrich rattled off precise numbers and descriptions of provisions, Clinton was forced to consult aides repeatedly for information. Of course, had the discussion turned to Whitewater, Clinton would have known more.

Perhaps to make up for the president's weakness, Vice President Al Gore has treated Gingrich contemptuously in the talks. He has often interrupted Gingrich with complaints the speaker's facts are wrong, his interpretation incorrect, etc. Republicans have been more respectful when Clinton holds forth, listening in glazed silences to his soliloquies.

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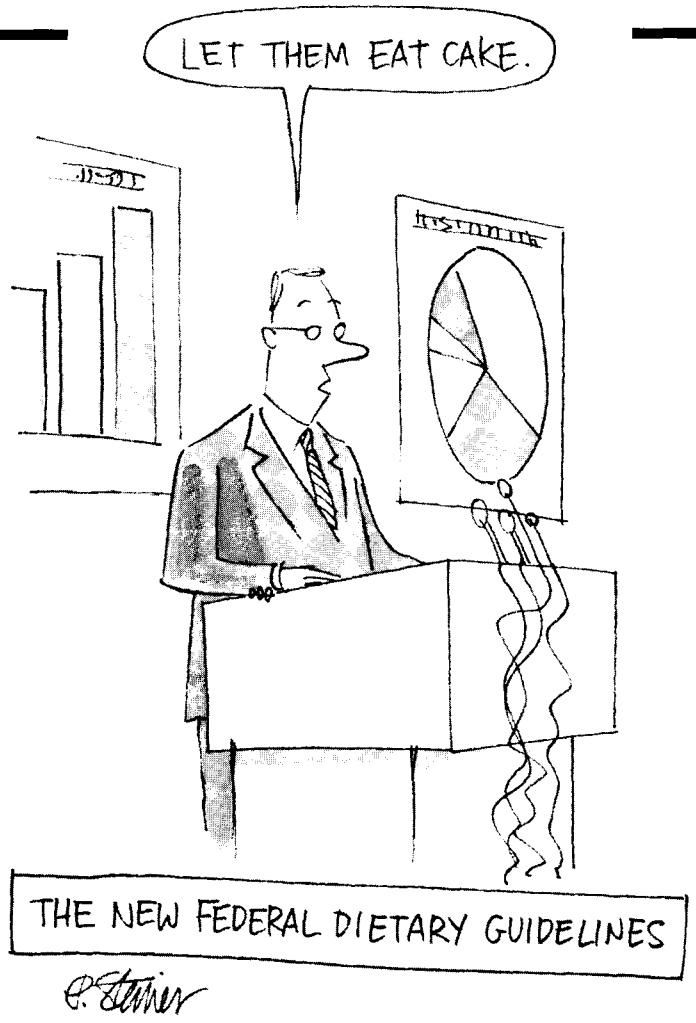
Scrapbook



Witchel without a Broom

The *New York Times* "Home" section on January 4 featured a profile by Alex Witchel of Edye Smith. Mrs. Smith is the mother of two small boys killed in the Oklahoma City bombing. And she has been, per Witchel, "available to the press" ever since. Wait, you say, *which* press? Who's Edye Smith? Well, you obviously haven't been reading the *National Enquirer*, where Mrs. Smith has apparently become a regular tabloid presence. Which is all the excuse Witchel needed.

Her story told us that Mrs. Smith has: visited male strippers' bars; recently remarried her boys' father at a ceremony subsidized by the *Enquirer*; and allowed film crews to photograph her pregnancy tests. Her husband's daughter's stepfather is in prison. Edye's stepfather is conducting "his own" investigation into the bombing; she's convinced the government is complicit in the tragedy. But Edye has a "disconcerting calm" about that event; she knows she will see her boys again in Heaven.

Thus, the *New York Times* portrait of Edye Smith, mother of two murdered children: a not-very-sophisticated, lower-middle-class Christian white woman. Witchel wants us to feel sorry for her. But she also wants us to think that Edye is a fool and a rube. Unlike Alex Witchel, who may be a barbarian, but at least knows enough to wear Ferragamos.

The Reading List

Last issue, we began our "Find the Deliberate Error in the Reading List" contest. It was a tough one, but as we expected, at least one of our readers caught it. He is John F. Isham of Akron, Ohio, and he writes: "In *The Devils*, Dostoyevsky parodies Ivan Turgenev, not Ivan Goncharov." Congratulations, Mr. Isham! Turgenev is, of course, the author of the anti-anarchist novel *Fathers and Sons*, while Goncharov's most famous work is *Oblomov*, the portrait of aristocratic sloth that led Lenin to remark, famously, "We must stamp out Oblomovism!"

This week, Elliott Abrams of Great Falls, Va., offers us this fascinating tidbit: "Paul Horgan's ***Whitewater*** is a novel about growing up in a small town in the Southwest after the Second World War. While very readable, it is not in the same league with Horgan's novel about the opening of the Southwest to settlement, ***A Distant Trumpet***. Still, until James McDougal writes his memoirs, this is the only ***Whitewater*** we are likely to have."

Also in the category of books whose titles have strange resonance to the current political situation:

Can You Forgive Her? by Anthony Trollope. The story of two young women—Laura Kennedy and Glencora M'Cluskie—who are torn between the men who deserve them and the men who excite them, with a title question that might well be asked by former Travelgate chief Billy Dale of Hillary Rodham Clinton, now that we know she personally ordered his persecution.

Our Mutual Friend, by Charles Dickens. The title of this complex tale of London scavengers might also refer to every single person in the state of Arkansas.

Yes, there's a mistake embedded somewhere in this item. Send your correction to: Reading List, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th St. NW, Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036.

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Casual

It's an S&M Kind of Thing

Recently, in pursuit of my voyeuristic vocation, I responded to an ad from Black Rose, a Washington, D.C., social club "for adults involved with dominance and submission in caring relationships." For the beginner's meeting—"S&M and Your Family"—we packed into a rented storefront church much like your run-of-the-mill Presbyterian establishment but for the AIDS literature and pictures of entwined same-sex parishioners fellowshipping at potlucks past.

They say ("they" being various and suspect sources claiming expertise on perverse social sub-strata) that some 15-25 percent of this great nation's citizenry is seriously kinked—into varying degrees of S&M, from light spankings to antics involving the Pony-Boy full-body harness with bridle and bit. I wouldn't have believed it before my Black Rose nights.

Beneath a doubly appropriate portrait of Jesus grieving at Gethsemane, the predictable suspects were present: two beefy lesbians clinging to each other like Bounce softeners, another leathered she-hemoth in a handcuff chokelet, and a mustachioed Bruce Dern-lookalike in his Limited Express Catholic schoolgirl mini whose matted hairy gams suggested fishnets full of tautog.

But the rest of the packed house could live next door to you. In fact, they may have been you: grandparents and tax lawyers and high-security-clearance federal workers—front-porchers all, with their Ajax-white tennis shoes and sartorial synthetics.

According to their leader, a self-proclaimed former Secret Service agent whom I'll call Bilbo for his uncanny resemblance to Tolkien's Hobbit, plenty of congressmen have stopped by to make contacts, though I had no luck in wresting names. I probably could have, had I applied techniques learned in Bilbo's lecture on "How to Conduct an Interrogation," delivered in black tights, executioner's mask, Sherwood Forest blouse—the full Inquisition rig.

But first, family concerns—which weren't many. Sure, there was talk of busted marriages, scornful parents, kids finding the *Leather Journal* under coffee tables after parties—these things must be shrugged off. As Bilbo says, "We've got a lot of weird people hanging around the house, and mistakes are going to get made." But except with prepubescent children, candor is ideal: "If [my son] comes to me with a question, I won't say, 'I won't talk to you about that.' That would be wrong."

More important is grappling with inner turmoil, which Bilbo says "can and hopefully will go away." He stresses, "The first thing to understand is that what we do is not wrong or harmful." For this audience, sex is not simply an act of love or pleasure but a validation and celebration of their own delectable quirks, which may need to be explained or rationalized but never renounced. While extremely personal, all this is to be discussed very publicly, as often as possible, because it is the holy that trumps all other holies—My Sexuality. And at what cost to family? That's the good news—there is none!

Moral distinctions are for trolling "vanillas" like myself—civilians who don't need to swab with Bactine after bouts of bedside artistry. But there are other worries for those whose sex life is their craft. Should you purchase the Braided Leather Cat O'Nine or the faster, meaner Johnny Corkscrew with the Turk's head knots? With Valentine's Day around the corner, do you get him the Sonofabirch with the French-whipped handles or the ax-handle Magna Strap, billed as the "ultimate in man-sized whuppin' gear"? And for her, The Crapper (half cropper, half slapper), the Nipple Cuffs with pearly bead toppers and attachable charms, or the Erector Set which is . . . don't ask.

Bilbo himself is a sort of Marquis de Martha Stewart. Having converted his suburban Virginia basement into a $7,500 medieval dungeon for playing interrogation scenes, from "Downed Pilot" to "Honduras Hangar with a Car Battery and a Meathook," he dispatches helpful techniques to players on a budget:

Covered massage tables serve nicely as racks. Keep the Gregorian chant as soft background. Always use amber light. In a dark room and with proper suggestive prepwork, oatmeal and wild rice sub for weevil-filled gruel. Burn with candle wax instead of molten lead. When issuing witches' summonses, buy parchment at an office supply store, burn the edges, then stick it in a mailing tube so it's suitable for later framing.

Before whipping, electro-shocking, beating, etc., bondage is key, says Bilbo. "It demeans your position as the Grand Inquisitor to have to chase the prisoner around. Keep the little bloody buggers tethered down." And by all means, when enacting fantasies involving cutlery, use viscous liquid on a dull knife. Palmolive for blood—with a blindfold and cold steel, no one can tell the difference.

Always observe safety first, plan for success, and remember that we're not hurting anybody—just each other.

MATT LABASH

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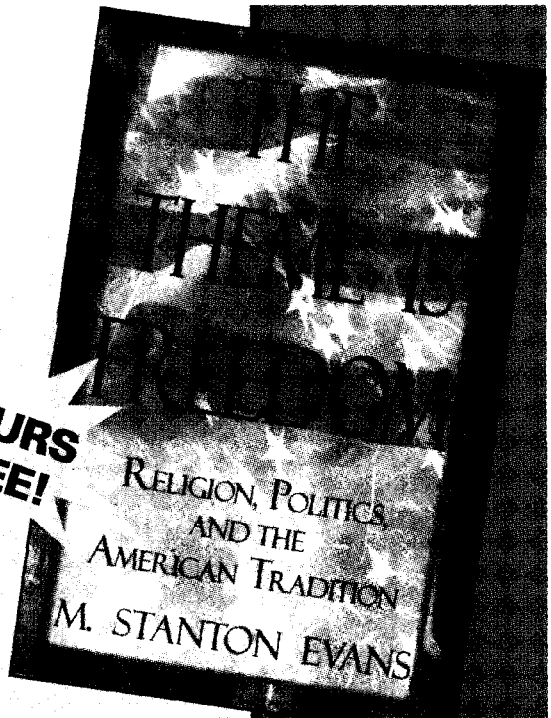
NOW, the truth about Christianity's central role in fostering our once-great system of government



TO M. STANTON EVANS,
THE BIG LIBERAL LIE IS THIS:

"Religion and liberty have always been in conflict. Freedom, democracy, and intellectual inquiry flourished in the pagan era, were crushed during the Christian Middle Ages, and revived only when Renaissance humanists threw off the shackles of belief."

BUT THE TRUTH, EVANS PROVES, IS JUST THE OPPOSITE:

It is Christianity—not humanism—from which the Western ideal of liberty derives and why faith and freedom must go together and always have.

Evans also brilliantly addresses these compelling issues:

- ★ What liberals really mean by "freedom" and how that differs from the entire Western tradition
- ★ The real "wall of separation" erected by the First Amendment—and torn down by the liberals
- ★ The key contributions to our form of government—downplayed in standard histories—by the early Christian settlers
- ★ Why liberty as we conceive it existed nowhere in the ancient world—not even "democratic Athens"
- ★ How Christianity humanized or abolished the brutal aspects of ancient Greek and Roman culture
- ★ Why the Declaration of Independence and the French "Declaration of the Rights of Man" are not the ideological "twins" of liberal mythology, but radically opposed

Author Evans shows that the ideas of limited government, the free market, and private property, actually derived from Christian principles, and are unthinkable without them. The proof is as plain as recent history: government hostility to individual liberty has grown lock-step with its hostility to religion. Evans takes you deep into church history and the development of free economics, linking them brilliantly.

"Sure to become a classic restatement of a tradition of liberty now all but extinct in this country, but without which the American public could not have existed. If that tradition survives, it will be in large part because in its last days it could still generate defenses as vigorous as the one Mr. Evans has written."

—Samuel Francis, *Washington Times*

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Abortion: the Legal and Moral Issues

Noemie Emery's article ("Abortion and the Republican Party: A New Approach," Dec. 25) was politically astute. By substituting moral suasion for political action against abortion, the GOP might be able to hold the right-to-life vote while solidifying its grasp on suburban libertarians.

But for those of us who actually care about the rights of the unborn, her piece had some glaring omissions. For example, is Emery in favor of the Hyde Amendment? Also, assuming a right-to-life amendment couldn't pass a Republican Congress, is she in favor of a constitutional amendment to allow abortion to be regulated by the states? This might pass in the next few years, especially if a Republican president is willing to give more than lip service to the cause.

It probably doesn't suit the calculations of cynical political strategists, but the right-to-life movement is reaching a moment of truth with the Republicans. We may not prevail, but at least we will part company with sanctimonious moralists who really don't mean what they say.

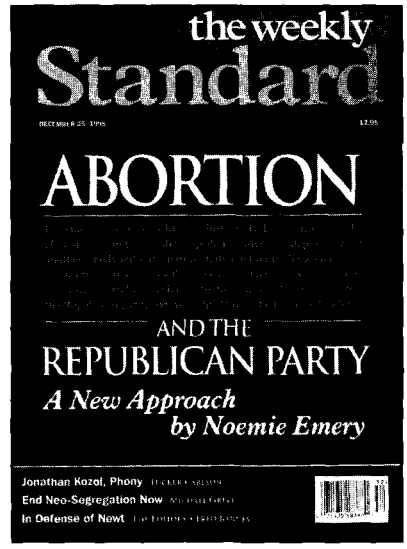
MICHAEL FARRELL
WASHINGTON, DC

So telling have pro-life arguments been that the pro-choice movement must now simulate them. The new pro-choice writers admit, even insist, that the slaughter is wrong; they merely require that it be permitted. Thus, though "stunned by the voice of the left," writers like George McKenna, Naomi Wolf, and Noemie Emery remain "unmoved by the right's plea for legal barriers." Abortion should be reduced, they allow, but only through "voluntary and non-coercive means." Haven't we seen all this before? "Safe, legal, and rare" cried New Democrats in 1992. New Republicans now respond, "The same for us—but we mean it."

Emery's confusion is not just tactical, but logical and moral. She describes the unborn child as "life, but just barely . . . live, but not viable . . . human, but not fully developed." If viability means ability to survive outside the womb unaided, then neither is a toddler viable. If full development means complete maturity of organs, then neither is a teenager fully developed. And calling a child barely alive is like calling a woman barely pregnant.

J. BUDZISZEWSKI
AUSTIN, TX

I'm sorry to learn that THE WEEKLY STANDARD has been struck by Bennett's Disease (chief symptom: an abrupt softening of the spine when abortion is mentioned). But I don't doubt for a moment that Emery means well.



I've noticed that writers of the call-it-evil-but-keep-it-legal school tend to emphasize the idea of "consensus." The context is usually some sort of argument that a public consensus on the immorality of abortion must precede any attempt to protect the victims by law.

Before *Roe* v. *Wade*, neither the federal nor state governments had enacted an abortion law as permissive as the one imposed by the court's fiat. The pro-abortionists did not wait for a consensus in their favor. They forged their own consensus, using every means available, including law. To the extent that our culture has accepted abortion, the immense symbolic and didactic impact of the law is largely responsible for it.

The longer abortion remains legal, the more ingrained this attitude will become. Moral suasion will be of limited use so long as our fundamental law teaches us that what we are calling a monstrous evil is really a fundamental human right.

C.H. ROSS
NASHVILLE, TN

The Republican conservative revolution is accomplishing what it has by purposely keeping abortion off the agenda. Appropriately so, because conservatism is about decreasing the power of government in our lives.

Abortion needs to be handled by an extremely important controlling principle: that the Republicans are the party of personal freedom and responsibility, regardless of how much those with moral agendas would like to control the lives of others (especially if they can do it on a grand scale out of Washington).

Abortion is a personal freedom and choice. Contrary to Noemie Emery's politically suicidal and divisive recommendation, the platform should say, "The Republican Party is the party that thinks abortion is a woman's personal decision, not a politician's decision, and certainly not a federal politician's decision."

What a laughable conceit to think that politicians, who have proved beyond a doubt that they can't control money, can now control sex.

BERT MCLACHLAN
LEAWOOD, KS

Noemie Emery's proposal to shift the grounds of opposition to legalized abortion from changing laws to moral suasion is a clever attempt to broaden the Republican voter base. But it is naive and constitutes a weakening of the party's moral stance.

Does Emery really think moral suasion has not been used in the pro-life crusade to outlaw abortions? Does she believe pro-choice advocates are unaware that the premeditated killing of innocent unborn human life constitutes a serious moral problem? We might just as well abolish all laws against premeditated murder and depend on moral suasion to save lives. How absurd.

Most people will not heed mere persuasion when their selfish desires are at stake. Even public legal pressure and risk of punishment will not deter many

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intent on abandoning their moral responsibility to care for the human results of their sexual choices. Both moral suasion and unrelenting campaigns to change laws must go forward if we are to reduce the 1.5 million annual murders of the innocent. What's more, a truly moral Republican party will be a winning one.

ROBERT L. CLEATH
ARROYO GRANDE, CA

For 23 years, pro-choicers have been looking for a way to silence and deactivate the right-to-life movement. Now Noemie Emery and others who claim to be pro-life are trying to do the job for them.

Yes, abortion is divisive. It always was and will be until *Roe* v. *Wade* is overturned. No matter how long abortion remains legal, it will never be morally acceptable to decent, thoughtful people. To ask grass-roots moral conservatives to be quiet about it during an election year is the same as asking us to quietly accept a decadent culture and amoral leaders without protest. It will never happen.

MARIA NOLAN
MEADOWBROOK, PA

There were only a few crucial points missing from Noemie Emery's otherwise thorough article, the most grievous being Emery's curious misstatement that the fetus is "life, but just barely." The fetus acquires genetic autonomy at conception, a beating heart by day 18, and brain function on an EKG after day 40.

Abortion remains the most beloved "feminist" statement on campus and in the workplace. Exercising one's choice is understood as the "choice" to end life, and thus celebrate one's liberation from our patriarchal moral, societal, political, and physical "oppression."

But the feminist who believes in liberation lies when she says that there are no risks to choosing an abortion. There is no such thing as a "safe" abortion, legal or otherwise. The NIH and CDC could not care less about the risks of abortion. No one in the medical establishment bothers to track many devastating complications, nor are abortionists required to inform their patients of side-effects like inadvertent sterilization, the potential for chronic PID, psychological post-abortion trauma, severe hemorrhaging, and breast cancer (which has been linked to abortion by 40 different studies).

We can curb our current abortion-as-contraception addiction without repealing *Roe*, by regulating the industry and tracking complications. Once women are told what an abortion can lead to, they will turn to pregnancy crisis centers and adoption agencies.

BETH WILLIAMS
WESTAMPTON, NJ

For all its sophistication, the proposal by Noemie Emery for how the Republican party might improve its platform on abortion fails to deliver. A careful reading will reveal that it does little more than recommend that the party apply a moral figleaf to try to cover up the glaring inconsistency of its existing "big tent" philosophy.

Any way you slice it, the underlying message of Emery's proposal to pro-choice Republicans is that a right of abortion will be preserved. Therefore, it will be understood that the Republican party will begin to acknowledge a fundamental right of access to the procedure. This should be enough to relieve the anxieties of those Republicans who generally support abortion rights.

Incredibly, moral compromise on abortion is the moral strategy that is supposed to convince this nation that abortion is wrong and ought not to be practiced in a civilized society.

KEN GERSTENMAIER
MORRISTOWN, TN

Noemie Emery's article is a fair response to the new dialogue on abortion. Her focus on moral persuasion and consensus leads me to hope that a sustainable middle ground will be attained.

But why must she resort to outdated, reactionary arguments about the relations between the sexes? What is the point of connecting abortion with smut, or Packwood with feminism? Men treat women as "things" because they have done so without correction for millennia, not because women obtained the right to safely abort in 1973.

Families are not breaking down because women have the right to choose abortion. They are breaking down because women are finally becoming independent human beings, and men just don't know what to do about it. Why present women with the choice between being romanticized and idealized on one hand, and being subject to "mayhem and battery" on the other?

A person who can find the middle ground on the abortion issue can begin to look forward to a situation of true human equality, and not be limited by the traditional fundamentalist view. When women cease being men's possessions, then they will truly be liberated. Abortion is just a sideshow, though a morally very troubling one.

WAYNE BAYER
CHEVY CHASE, MD

The Supreme Court, not the Republican party, made abortion a legal issue. Abortion will remain a legal issue until *Roe* v. *Wade* is revoked. Despite Emery's arguments, legal abuse requires a legal solution.

Of course, abortion has never ceased to be a moral issue as well. The fact that members of the Supreme Court nullified freedom of life for a segment of humanity creates a moral dilemma that will not just "go away."

Only a constitutional amendment will guarantee that some future court will not again legalize abortion.

GEORGE G. MCCULLOCH
OKMULGEE, OK

Noemie Emery answers critics and elaborates on her arguments in a second article, which begins on page 16 of this issue.

THE WEEKLY STANDARD
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The Princeton Economic Institute Proposal *for* tax reform & economic growth

1. Abolish the personal income tax; replace it with a 10-percent national retail sales tax.

Abolish the personal income tax and replace it with a 10-percent, national retail sales tax. The products and services not subject to that tax include basic rent on housing, non-prepared food, health care, and medicine. The purchase and sale of stocks, bonds, gold bullion or futures contracts, option or warrants will also be exempt. This will immediately reduce the cost of American labor by 25 percent within the U.S. economy. Furthermore a national retail sales tax will end the discrimination against American citizens, requiring all residents and visitors to pay their portion of the federal tax burden. According to the IRS, 17 percent of the economy is underground, contributing nothing toward the overall well being of the nation. Only a sales tax will capture that revenue.

2. Mandate a 15-percent raise.

Stipulate a 15-percent net increase in take-home pay for every wage earner. This will still result in a 10-percent reduction in the cost of American labor relative to current levels, thereby increasing American competitiveness.

3. Increase excise taxes.

A 10-percent increase in excise taxes including the gasoline tax should be implemented. Surveys have shown, after a retail sales tax, gasoline taxes are the best tolerated by the American public.

4. Implement a low, 2-percent national retail sales tax on real estate.

A national sales tax on real estate of two percent should be imposed. This will be split one percent for the buyer and one percent for the seller. This will apply to residential as well as commercial property. This will result in a drastic reduction from the current capital gains tax situation and eliminate the taxation of the elderly who have accumulated their savings in a large part within their home. This will enable the elderly to sell their home once the children have gone and use part of that equity for retirement by reinvesting in a smaller retirement facility. Currently, such persons are forced to borrow against their homes, which is more cost effective than selling their home subject to capital gains tax rules.

5. Flatten business income taxes.

All business operations, whether partnership, proprietorship, or corporation, will be subject to a flat, 15-percent business income tax. The only deductions from the net tax are research & development, charitable contributions, and $1,000 per employee to encourage job creation. Any business earning more than twice expenses (minus director or owner salaries, loans, transfers, dividends, or pension payments) will be subject to a flat, 25-percent income tax.

6. End all taxes on capital gains, gift and inheritance, and savings and dividends.

7. Repeal the 16th Amendment.

The repeal of the federal government's authority to impose an income tax on American citizens as authorized by the 16th Amendment. Based on previous Supreme Court rulings, business and corporations are still subject to income taxes; these changes do not apply to the states.

8. Make any tax increase expire after four years; subject any increase or continuance to a national referendum.

9. Take Social Security off budget.

Social Security must be taken off budget and allowed to become an honest trust fund where the capital contribution will be reinvested. The agency must be segregated, free from lobbying efforts on the part of the private sector as well as the public sector. The guiding principle must be economic security as implied by the name. No funds held by the Social Security system may be diverted in any way whatsoever by Congress, including restraint upon investment of such funds or mandatory investment in Federal government bonds. A maximum of 50 percent of all funds may be invested in either the private sector or government sector. The fund will be allowed to buy listed stocks with a capitalization in excess of $1 billion. Stocks must be U.S.-based operations only. Any bonds (private, state, local, or federal) must not be of an issue rated less than A+, of foreign origin, or of greater maturity than 10 years.

10. Incorporate a tax amnesty.

Phase I of tax reform includes a tax amnesty program. Anyone who has income that has remained unreported and is currently not in negotiation with the IRS, may come forward and pay a flat, 15-percent income tax without penalty or interest. Those funds will be earmarked to allow the independent establishment of the Social Security trust fund. This will provide the seed capital, allowing the new system to be as secure and honest as any private pension plan as prescribed by law.

11. Balance the budget.

A balanced budget target should be the ultimate goal and spending would be subject to mandatory across the board reduction if interest expenditures exceed 15 percent of total government expenditure, exclusive of Social Security.

Summary

The enactment of this proposal will broaden the tax base. It does not shift the tax base from capital and investment to the working middle class. The elimination of income tax and stable, predictable rates will attract offshore capital into the U.S. The net sum of these points will create the single greatest economic expansion in the history of the United States and perhaps the western world.

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the weekly Standard

Don't Get Mad, Get Even

It would be impossible to exaggerate how badly Republican budget-balancers feel they've been violated by the White House these past several months. Even by Washington standards, administration budget tactics have been astonishingly crude and deceitful. So you can sympathize with the still-widespread GOP reluctance fully to abandon its government shutdown weapon until the president finally capitulates.

But that strategy isn't working. The "leverage" of a government shutdown, however it might be modified in the future, is obviously insufficient to force Bill Clinton's concurrence in a genuine balanced budget. And because congressional Republicans control too few votes to override his veto, such a budget requires the president's okay. He'll either sign it or he won't, depending entirely on how he calculates his reelection possibilities—a fact that infuriates the suddenly helpless GOP all the more.

Instead of getting mad to no effect, though, maybe it's time for Republicans to get even. Maybe it's time to call the whole thing off, place blame for fiscal failure where it justly resides—with Clinton—and take the issue to the country. All the way to November.

The current round of Washington budget summitry began on Nov. 28 in the Mansfield Room of the Capitol. As that first meeting was breaking up, House budget committee chairman John Kasich asked Leon Panetta if the White House would present its own seven-year balanced-budget plan using accounting assumptions employed by Congress. Panetta told Kasich yes, they would. The president had already pledged, in writing, his cooperation in the achievement of such a deal. And without a detailed, consistently "scored" opening bid from the administration, the two sides would be unable seriously to negotiate the differences between them, big and small.

On Dec. 15, in the same room, it came time to pony up. Kasich and his Senate counterpart, Pete Domenici, made a new offer, using relaxed deficit projections from the Congressional Budget Office to move $75 billion in Clinton's direction on Medicare and other social spending. Panetta, for the White House, offered . . . nothing. Less than nothing, in fact. His "plan" was an outline only, using administration budgeting conventions.

Leon, you promised, the stunned Republicans complained. "No, I didn't," Panetta replied. In politics, as in real life, this is what's called a flat-out lie.

Several weeks into the resulting shutdown, Democratic budget boorishness has only gotten worse. On Wednesday, Jan. 3, for example, just before the Republican leadership was due to leave for the West Wing and another fruitless talk session, they got a call from the White House. Please hold up a while, they were asked; the president's got a tiny scheduling issue. Which issue, minutes later, turned out to be a nationally televised presidential "news briefing," during which Clinton dumped all over the GOP for a "cynical political strategy" on the budget, one that has hurt "pregnant women, the disabled, and poor children." Congress should reopen the government, the president proclaimed. "Both sides want to balance the budget," after all.

You'd have thought so. On paper, at least, they're tantalizingly close to agreement on a seven-year deal conservatives would hardly have dared dream about not long ago. At the outside limit, Congress and the White House are divided by maybe $60 billion a year, less than 4 percent of total government spending—on a budget that would, either way, almost certainly reduce taxes, end the federal welfare entitlement, salvage (by partially marketizing) Medicare, and impose real-dollar cuts in domestic social programs for the first time in a quarter century. Not a happy prospect for liberalism.

But for the longest time it seemed Clinton was prepared to do it, just the same. If he engineered a few loud, phony disputes over Republican "extremism" during the negotiations, maybe the Left wouldn't notice how Right the final deal really was. And that deal in hand, the president would be immunized against an otherwise obvious fall campaign charge from his Republican challenger: that Bill Clinton is

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the only thing standing between America and a balanced budget.

This script has worked even better than the White House had hoped—apparently to the point where they no longer feel they need to stick with it all the way to the end. Clinton is having endless, high-profile meetings with the Republican leadership, meetings that confer unearned legitimacy on his claimed "support" for a balanced budget. Republicans protest that the president *isn't* really willing to balance the budget. But out there in the hinterland, what swing voter can be expected to understand that's true? From a distance, it really *might* look like the GOP has adopted an "our way or no way" budget posture, and that Clinton really *is* merely defending the "helpless." Helpless people like 90-year-old Joseph Rourke, whom congressional Democrats recently pushed before the cameras to report how his Alzheimer's-afflicted wife may, under a shutdown, lose access to the federal Meals on Wheels program.

Now, Mr. and Mrs. Rourke live in the Ward Circle area of Washington, D.C., a tony neighborhood of $300,000-plus homes. And the Meals on Wheels program is funded through a Labor/HHS appropriations bill that would pass Congress easily—if only Senate *Democrats* would drop their filibuster threat (over an unrelated labor-movement issue) and allow a vote. No matter. This can't be explained on the evening news. In the unreality of Washington political theater, Republicans are once again the evil landlord. And Grandma's getting pushed out into the snow.

In a few short weeks, if the current budget dynamics aren't sharply altered, the president will arrive at the Capitol for his State of the Union address and use an hour and a half of prime time to bemoan "gridlock" over the balanced budget he wants and the nation deserves. Only the heartless extremism of his Republican opponents stands in the way of that glory, he will say. It will be a disgusting, dishonest performance. Everyone will then return to the bargaining table. The deal will never actually get done—*because the president doesn't really need it to*. Ross Perot will have his excuse to run for president as a spoiler. And then Bill Clinton may occupy the Oval Office until the 21st century.

Enough, already. Hill Republicans should move to end this farce. But not the way the nervous moderates among them now imagine. The government shouldn't reopen "until budget negotiations are concluded." That's exactly backwards. Negotiations should cease first—immediately and forever.

The GOP should make a big, splashy, good-faith and final offer—magnanimously agreeing to split remaining differences with the White House. If Clinton takes the deal, fine: Congress can pass a good, strong, creditable conservative budget. But if Clinton declines, there should be no more bargaining. The Republican leadership should spend a few sorrowful days reminding the country how hard they tried, and how the president wasn't even prepared to meet them half-way. Then—and *only* then—Speaker Gingrich and Senator Dole can pass continuing resolutions to reopen closed government offices (and a debt-limit extension to prevent the Treasury from defaulting on its debt obligations next month).

The bad news is the budget won't get balanced this year. Once it's clear that's what's happening, the financial markets may go south, and recession fears will intensify. A pity. But the good news is things will look like what they are—*Bill Clinton's* fault—if Republicans play their cards skillfully. And this year's GOP presidential candidate will have a pretty good campaign plank in the fall.

It was always true: Without Clinton's signature, we can't have a balanced budget this year. Right now, it appears we need a new president for that. Congressional Republicans should work quickly to improve the chances we get one.

—David Tell, for the Editors

Oh, Stop Your Whining

by David Grann

Despite what Enid Waldholtz may think, life is not the *Jenny Jones* program. Her five-hour, teary-eyed press conference last month deserves an Emmy for stamina and strength, but in presenting herself as her husband's unwitting victim she failed the most important test of a politician: personal accountability.

Nor is she alone. In the five scandals that have tainted the 104th Congress, the guilty have refused to shoulder any blame for their misdeeds. They have shamelessly revived the double standards for men and women, blacks and whites. And in the case of Republican offenders, they have made a mockery of their campaign promise to promote individual responsibility.

Victimology is seedy enough on talk shows, but it is despicable in Congress, where, at least in theory, the buck stops. Even Bob Packwood warned in 1992 that

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with "cynicism about people in public . . . at an all time high, there must be accountability and responsibility for official actions and conduct."

Indeed. But the Oregon Lothario broke this vow when he blamed his buffoonery on everything from the bottle to the Ethics Committee to embittered women. The only thing the Anglo-Saxon senator couldn't do was play the race card.

Rep. Walter Tucker, however, could, and did. Convicted of extortion by a racially mixed jury, the Baptist minister insisted he was a victim of prejudice: "There was Marion Barry before me. There was O.J. Simpson before me. There was Mike Tyson and Mike Jackson. You may as well call me Mike Tucker."

He forgot to include Mel Reynolds. The former two-term representative and Rhodes scholar, convicted of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old schoolgirl, still contends he was just another black man brought down by the system.

"You're in a fool's paradise if you think race doesn't play a part in this prosecution, because it does," he said, warning he would not crawl if "shackled like my slave ancestors."

One can hardly blame him for trying. Such pleas worked for O.J. Simpson. This time, however, there was no Mark Furhman, no ill-fitting glove. Instead, an FBI-recorded phone call caught Reynolds panting for sex with a 15-year-old Catholic virgin. "What did I hit—*the Lotto*?" he exclaimed.

Tucker, videotaped by the FBI pocketing thousands of dollars from a lobbyist, says, "God will vindicate" his name. Reynolds had put his faith in the less spiritual appeals process.

Now comes Rep. Barbara-Rose Collins, starring as the latest victim of the week. The Democratic congresswoman from the burned-out streets of Detroit is under investigation by the FBI and the ethics committee for everything from decorating her house with campaign funds to pocketing scholarship money intended for inner-city youth.

Sean Delonas

In a press conference, Collins said, "I ask you, is this gender bias or is this racism?" Her chief of staff echoed these remarks to THE WEEKLY STANDARD: "I know the media's racist pure and simple." But, in this instance, most of the allegations against Collins come from African-Americans. Even the black-owned *Detroit Chronicle* beseeched her to jettison the race card.

Faced with such reprobation, Collins tried to take the victim role to new heights, whining to the *Detroit News*: "Racists have always been able to find Uncle Toms." Yet a black staffer of Collins told THE WEEKLY STANDARD: "If she was a white member, she would have been hung from the highest yardarm on the Capitol grounds."

The same double standard is evident in the Waldholtz case. What male politician, through a veil of tears, could claim he stole an election because his wife had duped him? In playing the damsel in distress, Waldholtz contradicts the core message of her own campaign and the Republican revolution: that each of us, whether surviving on welfare or a trust fund, must be responsible for our lives.

None of this is to say circumstances don't contribute to our sins. Of course, racism and sexism still exist. But while our environment certainly helps to explain our mistakes, it cannot shield us from our crimes.

With so much of America's civil society unraveling, politicians must own up to their bad deeds as well as their good ones. Not only is this the right thing to do, it may be their only hope for political survival: Voters, who can still distinguish between *Montel Williams* and C-SPAN, have already rallied their representatives and fellow jurors to boot three of Congress's so-called victims from office. Time is running out for the remaining two.

David Grann is executive editor of **The Hill.**

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Ten Truths About Crime

by John J. Dilulio, Jr.

For Republican governors and other responsible lawmakers, the first report of the newly formed bipartisan Council on Crime in America heralds a moment of truth. Will they heed the report's overwhelming facts and figures that support the average American's decades-old concern about revolving-door justice, or will they fail to enact—*and* fund, *and* implement—policies that keep known and convicted violent criminals, adult and juvenile, from repeatedly preying upon life, liberty, and property?

First, however, full disclosure: I (a Democrat) am a member of the council, which is co-chaired by former federal drug czar William J. Bennett (a Republican) and former U.S. Attorney General Griffin B. Bell (a Democrat).

Our report, released last week, focuses on numbers. First, the hard numbers on how much serious crime is committed by convicted criminals whom the system has released time and again. Second, the tragic numbers on how many people are killed and victimized each year by "supervised" community-based predators. Third, the vast numbers of ordinary Americans of every race, creed, and region who are fed up with government's failure to honor its end of the social contract. And it explodes dozens of myths about the state of violent crime and punishment. Here is a small but representative sample:

Myth 1: Violent crime is going down.

Fact: Despite recent dips, violent crime rates remain at historic highs, and demographic trends (more fatherless, Godless, and jobless young males) mean big trouble ahead. There were 43.6 million criminal victimizations in America in 1993, over 10 million of them violent.

Myth 2: The toll of violent crime is exaggerated.

Fact: You are more than twice as likely to be victimized by violent crime as you are to be injured in a car accident, and about as likely to be murdered as you are to die from AIDS. The violent crimes committed each year cost their victims and society about $400 billion.

Myth 3: Most violent crimes against whites are done by blacks.

Fact: In 1993 only 18 percent of the 8.7 million violent crimes against whites were committed by blacks. About 80 percent of the 1.3 million violent crimes against blacks were done by blacks. Inner-city minority youth suffer disproportionately; for example, in 1994, all but 5 of Philadelphia's 89 youth homicide victims were non-white.

Myth 4: Revolving-door justice is real but rare.

Fact: The justice system imprisons barely 1 criminal for every 100 violent crimes. About 1 in 3 violent crimes is committed by someone on probation, parole, or pretrial release at the very moment that he murders, rapes, or attacks. On any given day, 7 convicted offenders are on the street for every 3 who are behind bars. During 1994 about 4.2 million cases were handled on probation and 1.1 million on parole. About 1.5 times as many convicted violent offenders are on probation or parole as in prison.

Myth 5: Revolving-door justice does not occur nationwide.

Fact: Community-based criminals are a menace in every state. For example, in 1994 only 671 of Dade County, Florida's 4,615 identified local career criminals (average of 20 prior felony arrests and 6 convictions) were behind bars. In one 58-month period, prisoners released early from Florida prisons were responsible for 25,919 crimes, including 4,654 violent crimes. Among the violent crimes that would have been averted had these offenders remained behind bars were 346 murders. Likewise, in one 3-year period, fully a third of Virginia's 1,411 convicted murders were "in custody" at the time they killed.

Myth 6: The system keeps a close watch on gun-toting felons.

Fact: About 42 percent of felony weapons defendants in 1992 were on probation, parole, or pretrial release at the time of their latest offense.

Myth 7: Prisons are full of mere first-time drug offenders.

Fact: Since 1974 over 90 percent of all state prisoners have been violent offenders or recidivists. Between 1980 and 1993, the number of persons in state prisons for violent crimes grew by 221,000, 1.3 times the growth in imprisoned "drug offenders." Most drug offenders have long criminal histories. Indeed, in the year prior to incarceration, most prisoners commit at least a dozen serious crimes, excluding all drug crimes.

Myth 8: Probation and parole violators pose little threat.

Fact: In 1991, 45 percent of state prisoners were persons who, at the very time they committed their latest crimes, were on probation or parole. While free in the community, they did at least 218,000 violent crimes including 13,200 murders and 11,600 rapes (over half of the rapes against children).

Myth 9: Because of mandatory sentencing, most prisoners now do long, hard time in overcrowded facilities under warehousing conditions.

Fact: Despite the enactment of mandatory laws, between 1985 and 1992 the average maximum sen-

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tence of prisoners declined about 15 percent from 78 months to 67 months. In 1992 the actual time served by violent felons (both jail credits and prison) was 43 months. On average, murderers released from state prisons in 1992 served only 5.9 years. In 1991 over 90 percent of all prisoners were in some type of job training, work, education, drug treatment, or other program. In 1994, the prison systems of 13 states and the District of Columbia had more beds than they had prisoners; most of the other states were only slightly "overcrowded." None of the major empirical studies of prison crowding finds that it raises levels of inmate violence, illness, or other serious problems.

Myth 10: More violent juvenile felons are being handled as adults.

Fact: Right—they, too, go through the revolving door. In 1991 about 51,000 male juveniles were held in public juvenile facilities, a third of them for violent crimes ranging from murder to robbery. But in 1992 alone there were over 110,000 juvenile arrests for violent crimes, and nearly 17 times that number for property and other crimes. The juvenile revolving-door system kills kids coming and going. For example, between 1990 and 1994, 75 percent of Boston's youth shooting and stabbing fatalities and 95 percent of its young killers had criminal histories.

Given these horrifying data, I must say (and I speak here only for myself, not for the council) that it is most disheartening to learn that Republican governor Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin has established a commission to study "alternatives to incarceration" and has declared he will build no more prisons. New Jersey's Christine Todd Whitman is busy consorting with national anti-incarceration advocacy groups.

Here's a simple spine-stiffening, mind-concentrating sentencing-policy exercise for responsible state lawmakers: Pursue whatever policies you please; but first pledge to make public accurate and complete statistics on the entire adult and juvenile records of any plea-bargain-gorged criminals released from custody as a result of your decisions.

And here's one for President Clinton and the Republican Congress: Right now the states provide, and the federal government publishes, data on how many rapists receive what kind of "treatment" behind bars, but not on such things as the age of rape victims and how many convicted murderers are on probation, parole, or pretrial release at the very moment they kill. As a condition of federal crime aid, mandate that states keep running tabs on the impact of crime on its victims and the overall toll of revolving-door justice.

The more Americans know the truth about violent crime, the less possible it will be for faithless leaders and activist judges to free dangerous criminals who deserve punishment.

John J. DiIulio, Jr., a professor at Princeton University, is an adjunct fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

I Gave at Church

by Timothy Lamer

There's an emerging consensus on the right that religious charities do a better job of helping the poor than does government. Sen. John Ashcroft of Missouri has thus proposed to allow states to funnel federal welfare dollars to churches and other overtly religious organizations so they can provide federal services and federal cash to the poor. But Christian conservatives, instead of leading the charge for Ashcroft's proposal, should be the first to recognize how problematic it is. If the money doesn't go toward proselytizing, it will be ineffective. But if it does, even indirectly, it will seriously violate both conservative and basic American principles.

Ashcroft's proposal is an amendment to the welfare reform bill. It would allow states to distribute their federal welfare block grants to charitable and other private groups, including religious organizations. Although churches and religious charities would not have to alter their religious character to get the federal money, the amendment says: "No funds provided directly to institutions or organizations to provide services and administer programs . . . shall be expended for sectarian worship, instruction, or proselytization."

If so, the good senator's proposal is a waste of money. The thing to keep in mind is why Christian charities work so much better than social services provided by government.

Are believers just more effective bureaucrats than non-believers? No, Christian charities do so well because Christ changes lives. When a Christian charity lifts someone out of poverty or drug abuse, the improvement in the person's circumstances or behavior is merely the outward manifestation of a change within the person; it is new fruit from a regenerated tree.

The gospel is the essential agent, the root of the spiritual change. Without proselytizing, then, Christ-

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ian charities will be no more effective than government or any other charity.

Of course, one could argue that money is fungible. It's a familiar conservative point, and it's true. When the government gives money to the Sierra Club to run a wildlife refuge, it frees up funds that can be used for lobbying, fundraising, and so forth. If it's true for the Sierra Club, it's true for the Southern Baptist Convention. Tax dollars given for "secular" use at Christian charities will free up church funds for proselytizing.

But that should concern all those, including evangelicals, who value religious liberty, a basic tenet of which is that citizens should not be taxed to support religions with which they disagree. Evangelicals in particular should remember that under the Ashcroft proposal, state governments will decide which charities get the federal dollars. In other words, raw political power will prevail. Whichever sects have the most influence in each state will get the coveted funds. Imagine the backlash when evangelicals realize that their money is going to support the Mormon Church in Utah and the Roman Catholic Church in Massachusetts. Or when Mormons and Catholics realize that their tax dollars are supporting the Southern Baptists in Tennessee.

If money really is fungible, then government support of Mormon charities means the Mormon Church can send more missionaries to, say, the South. And the Southern Baptists can do more evangelism in, say, Utah. There's no better way to start a real religious war in America than to coerce the faithful of any church into subsidizing what they view as a false religion.

Conservatives also need to think hard about what Ashcroft's proposal will mean for the future of welfare reform. What happens if a future Congress decides to reduce the amount of money given to states in welfare block grants? Will Christian charities and churches be willing to give up their subsidies when that happens?

It won't be easy. Federal funding is a narcotic. Once addicted, recipients find it hard to live without. As Art Smith of Volunteers of America told the *American Spectator*, government aid "impairs your impetus to go out and raise funds. That's a real danger all nonprofits face—just sitting back and figuring the government will take care of you." Once Christian charities get used to collecting the subsidy, they will develop programs and goals premised on receiving government aid. The threat of losing such aid will be genuinely terrifying. They will surely fight such cuts and thus become what conservatives detest—recipients of federal grants lobbying for "more." Are Christian conservatives prepared for the sight of Christian charities lobbying to keep their place at the federal trough?

Of all people, conservatives should know that federal funding always has unintended consequences. This proposal is no different. The ACLU and other opponents of Senator Ashcroft's amendment are—this time—on the side of the angels.

Timothy Lamer is director of the Free Enterprise & Media Institute of the Media Research Center in Alexandria, Virginia.

Daschle Our Hopes

by Matthew Rees

The day Tom Daschle was elected Senate minority leader in November 1994, he pledged independence from the Clinton administration. He was as good as his word this past December 30, when the House passed a measure that would have sent federal employees back to work. The measure had the tacit support of the Clinton administration—but Daschle would have none of it. He called it a "sham" and a "façade," and his opposition killed it in the Senate.

For all Daschle's talk of independence, however, this last-minute break with the White House was exceptional. Throughout 1995, he was a staunch administration ally. During meetings over the government shutdown, he allowed White House chief of staff Leon Panetta to be the lead negotiator. And he vigorously championed the administration's view that Congressional Budget Office forecasts could no longer be trusted.

This maneuvering came at the end of a year in which the minority leader's influence steadily increased. When Congress convened in January, Daschle, then just 47, was in over his head. He had won the leadership position by a single vote over Chris Dodd of Connecticut (though Daschle had spent eight months campaigning for the job, Dodd just 23 days). And Daschle had an additional handicap: He had never served in the minority, having been elected to the Senate in 1986. Thus, when legislation began making its way through the Senate early in the year, Republicans watched with amusement as Daschle struggled to contain the GOP juggernaut. "He was like a puppy dog lost in the park," recalls a Senate aide.

The inexperienced Daschle was almost totally eclipsed by Robert Byrd during the early debates over

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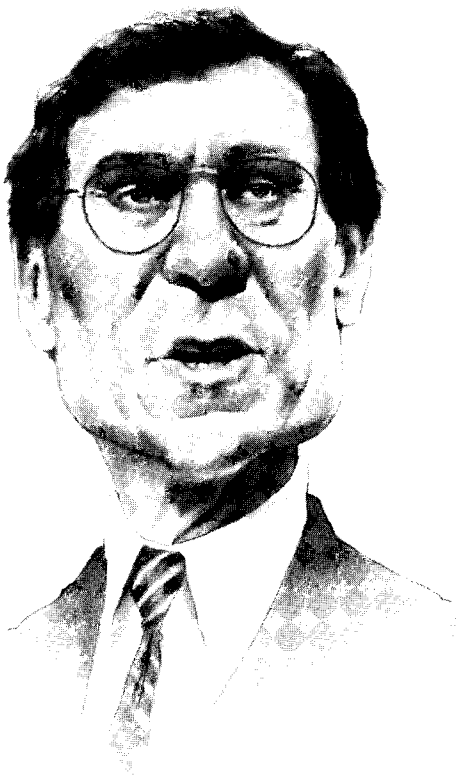
the balanced budget amendment and unfunded mandates. A former Democratic majority leader and the reigning expert on the Senate's byzantine parliamentary rules, Byrd occasionally lectured Daschle on the Senate floor. At one point during the unfunded mandates debate, Byrd inquired, "Where's our leader?"

Byrd has been but one hindrance to Daschle's effectiveness as minority leader. In a Senate populated by Democrats who profess little party allegiance and feel growing frustration with the White House, Daschle "can only reflect the lack of consensus," says Democratic consultant Ted Van Dyk. Another complication was a messy ethics investigation. In February, *60 Minutes* aired a segment on the fatal crash of a small charter aircraft owned by a friend of Daschle's. The segment focused on the senator, who, at his friend's behest, had sought to transfer responsibility for inspecting such aircraft from the Forest Service to the supposedly laxer Federal Aviation Administration. Daschle released a 31-page report defending his intervention, and on November 30 the Senate Ethics Committee dismissed the complaint. But the episode distracted him from Senate business off and on for nine months.



Chas Fagan

Where Daschle has been effective, it's been partly thanks to his chief counsel, John Hilley, who was chief of staff for the previous majority leader, George Mitchell, and is slated to be the next congressional affairs liaison in the Clinton White House. Daschle has drawn on Hilley's understanding of legislative and leadership issues to thwart the GOP. He has also foiled the Republicans in another way: Dole and others say they often find it excruciatingly difficult to negotiate with Daschle because they are never sure he has the support from Senate Democrats to live up to his end of a bargain.

One issue where Daschle succeeded in holding the Democrats together is regulatory reform. He labored mostly behind the scenes and at the request of the White House. The president is in a no-win situation if the bill lands on his desk: Signing it would alienate the party's influential green constituency, while a veto would undermine Clinton's effort to be seen as pro-business. So Daschle has striven to keep the bill from coming up for a vote, repeatedly cornering pro-reform Democrats such as Chuck Robb of Virginia and J. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana. Frustrated Republicans cite Daschle's legwork as the reason regulatory reform isn't likely to pass anytime soon.

Daschle's all-out effort on this issue is reminiscent of Mitchell's now-legendary blocking of a capital-gains tax cut in 1989. But there aren't many parallels between the two. Unlike Mitchell, Daschle is well liked by senators in both parties. His non-threatening demeanor, coupled with his endless back-scratching, endears him. It has also facilitated his rapid rise. Daschle is the prototypical professional politician. He was president of the Young Democrats in college, an intelligence officer in the Air Force, a Senate aide, then a member of Congress. Once in the Senate, Daschle befriended Mitchell and supported him in his 1988 race for majority leader. Later, Mitchell named Daschle head of the influential Senate Democratic policy committee.

Yet except for agriculture, obligatory for a senator from South Dakota, Daschle is not identified with any particular issue. Indeed, for someone who has spent 17 years in Congress, he has a remarkably slim record of legislative achievement. He has never even chaired a full committee in either house. Ideology isn't the explanation: Daschle is comfortably moderate-to-liberal. He endorsed Richard Gephardt in the 1988 presidential campaign, and in May 1990 he signed up with the Coalition for Democratic Values, a liberal advocacy group formed by now-retired senator Howard Metzenbaum to offset the centrist Democratic Leadership Council.

In his Senate role, Daschle will never be a George Mitchell, much less a Lyndon Johnson. He is far closer in temperament to former House speaker Tom Foley. He is deferential with Democratic senators, who are said to appreciate his manner after the high-handedness of a Mitchell or Byrd. As long as there is a Democrat in the White House and an aggressive Republican legislative agenda to unite Democrats in opposition, the gentle Daschle is secure. Remove either or both of those, and he may get swallowed up by any one of the Senate's other highly ambitious Democrats. ♦

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Abortion and the Republican Party (II)

A Rejoinder

by Noemie Emery

In my article "Abortion and the Republican Party: A New Approach" (Dec. 25), I did not seek, as *National Review* has claimed, to "make the GOP a pro-choice party." Nor do I "disavow anti-abortion laws as a goal."

I left the Democrats in part because they were a pro-choice, or rather, an abortion-friendly party. I support stringent restrictions, especially spousal notification. I prefer the restoration of total restrictions to the casual acceptance of elected abortion as a value-free lifestyle option. But I do, as I wrote, "worry about the real life consequences of forcing women who may be poor, frightened, or ignorant to bear children they resent and do not want."

Nothing I wrote was intended to strengthen the hand of either pro-life or pro-choice factions in the Republican party. Rather, it is an effort to find some ground that both can occupy while they work out their differences. Nothing I argued would stop those on either side from doing what they do at present: All are free to argue, lobby, agitate, and press their goals. True, a program of moral persuasion does not guarantee the imposition of legal restrictions. But it does not work *against* them. In fact, it is their only hope. No legal ban can endure in this climate, which must change through persuasion and time.

As George McKenna says, "The lesson for pro-life advocates is that they need to take time to lay out their case. They may hope for an immediate end to abortion, and they certainly have a First Amendment right to ask for it, but their emphasis, I believe, should be on making it clear to others why they have reached the conclusions they have reached. They need to reason with skeptics, and listen more carefully to critics. They need to demand less and explain more." Clever pro-lifers should seize on this plan, and use it to carry their case to the public. Then it is up to the public and them.

If mine is not exactly a hard pro-life proposal, it is farther away from pro-choice. Almost from the first to the very last sentence, my article is one long assault on the morals—or lack of them—of the hard-core choice lobbies, or what I choose to call the "hangnail school." I called them sinister, evil, and stunningly dangerous; citing in force the lies and evasions, the deceptions and camouflage, the moral cowardice and intellectual trickery in which this movement persistently traffics. Most of all, I cited the hypocrisy that is rotting the feminist movement, particularly the twin tracks of up-and-down deviance; the claims to be a nurturing party even as it defends as moral, legal, and totally justified a "health care procedure" that sucks out babies' brains. Repeatedly I said that the casual acceptance of elective abortion is a national poison, that is eating our soul. I stress the moral, rather than the legal, aspect, because this *is* the real issue: *It is simply not possible to maintain a true civil culture on the morals the "choice" ethos breeds*. As John Leo writes, this ethos claims fetal life takes its "rights" *entirely* from the mother's intentions: "a baby if you want it, a clump of tissue if you don't." The message of this is that life has no value outside of its interest to others: a sinister and subtly corrosive construct, with the power to drop a civilization in its tracks. It is a predator ethic, that teaches us to use others, and makes the weak dependent on the interest—the self-interest—of the strong. Feminists love this in

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regard to abortion, for it gives a woman absolute power over the fate of her developing child. They like it less when it is men who have power—social, fiscal, and physical power—and can use it against them. Appeals are too late, as our hearts have been chilled, often by their propaganda. How an approach that takes abortion out of the context of "rights," and puts it down hard among "social disorders," can be described as "pro-choice" is beyond me. But such is the principled mind.

As to principles, I am not certain to what they apply. To events, or intentions? The ends, or the means? If abortions decline in number because there are laws against them, is it better or worse than if they drop because they are made to seem hideous? Is a child saved by a law more alive than one saved when its mother is talked out of killing it? One baby saved by persuasion and given to people who love it is one more than has been saved by the human life amendment since its adoption at the 1980 Republican convention and through two Republican presidents. Giving up non-coercive means while one waits for the passage of the amendment means giving up all the children who die between now and whenever. And the culture gets more and more coarse.

There is a point at which principles become self-indulgence, if maintained too closely and for too long. One can betray through an excess of caution. But if one neglects any chance to move one's cause forward, one also betrays one's ideals. They remain just that—ideal, with no effect on real life. Some pro-lifers are in danger of resembling Democratic liberals, who become intoxicated with their good intentions, and, when in trouble, form circles, and fire on themselves.

If they were truly concerned with confounding their enemies, they would stop harassing the Powells and Whitmans, and train their fire on the left. They would ask President Clinton if he equates abortion and dentistry, and, if not, how he plans to discourage it. They would ask Mrs. Clinton, and her allies in Congress, if they favor abortion to get rid of girls, the use to which abortion is now most readily put in China. They could ask Patricia Ireland and Barney Frank if they would, science permitting, favor abortion to get rid of gays.

They could insist on answers, confronting the pro-choicers with the logical outcome of their ideology. They could flush the choice lobbies out of their cover of defending a "right" like all others, and force them to defend a compromised ethic, based on the morals of power and callousness. They could isolate the choice lobbies, stigmatize them, and impede their power to influence others. Instead, they seem eager to isolate and stigmatize themselves.

There is a sense in which pro-life and pro-choice lobbies are living in a shadow world. Locked in a small room with themselves and each other, they trade ritual phrases that resonate within their circles and mean nothing to people outside. Polls show both blocs estranged from the public, a situation that more than 20 years of intense lobbying, agitating, marching, demonstrating, pleading, advertising, and screaming on talk shows has done nothing whatever to move. The public has tuned out on all of them except to express irritation. It finds both blocs too rigid; one lacking all trace of moral sense or cohesion, the other lacking any sense of give whatsoever for the troubles that people can sometimes get trapped in, the confusions and the tragedies of life. The public believes, not in "yes" or "no," but in "yes, but," and "not really." It thinks abortion a sin, not a crime.

The trouble is that both blocs despise all these views, and frequently say so (which is part of the problem). But no movement in this democracy has ever made headway while holding the moral views of most Americans in such utter, undisguised contempt. The disposition of this ambivalent middle holds the key to this, as to all other problems: the candidates elected, the measures adopted, the laws that are passed and obeyed. To win the people in the middle, activists must learn to respect them, speak to them plainly, and frame the arguments in terms they understand.

For 20 years, the activists have screamed and screamed at one another, and the result has been futility, fury, and frequently violence: and the forcing of both parties, at the national level, into rigid stances most voters don't follow. These companion pieces so close together—mine, Naomi Wolf's in the *New Republic*, and George McKenna's in the *Atlantic Monthly*—are implicit signs that the debate is ready to break open. The pro-life bloc can use this moment to address the American people. Or it can slide back into the shadows with the pro-choicers and continue to scream. ♦

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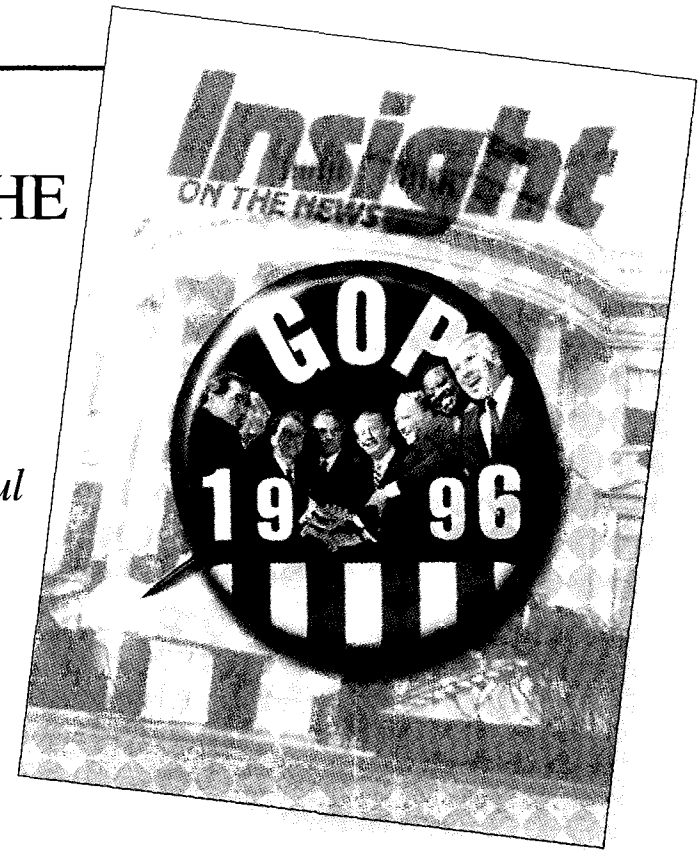

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Why Republicans Must Defeat Bill Clinton

By William Kristol

Can Bill Clinton be defeated? At first, in the wake of 1994, many Republicans assumed it would be easy. More recently, as Clinton has rebounded in the polls, Republicans have become more pessimistic. But, they say, it really doesn't matter that much; the future course of American politics and public policy is safely set in a conservative direction.

The time for such wishful thinking is over. The fact is that Clinton must lose if the Republican realignment is to advance. And to defeat Clinton, Republicans have to put aside, for now, most of their elevated dreams of conservative governance. They need to realize they won't be able to run on the claim of "promises made, promises kept"—because the Democratic president is likely to block the implementation of many of those promises. Republicans need to make the 1996 election a referendum on Clinton and liberalism. If they do, Clinton can be beaten.

How important is that? Very. If Clinton wins a second term, efforts to continue advancing a conservative reform agenda from the Hill are likely to fail. Clinton has already succeeded in stalling progress on issues ranging from affirmative action to entitlements, from deregulation to SDI. And Clinton will be far stronger in 1997, as a reelected president, than he was in 1995 after his massive repudiation by the voters. In addition, four more years of Clinton court appointments and administrative actions would do real damage. And a failed Republican presidential campaign would exacerbate the fissures in the Republican coalition, and would foster increased dissension within the disappointed ranks of conservatives.

CLINTON MUST LOSE IF THE REALIGNMENT IS TO ADVANCE. TO WIN, REPUBLICANS HAVE TO PUT ASIDE, FOR NOW, THEIR ELEVATED DREAMS OF CONSERVATIVE GOVERNANCE.

Now, some Republicans do acknowledge that 1997 and 1998 would be difficult years if Clinton were reelected; but they lick their chops in anticipation of huge congressional gains in 1998, given the historical record of sixth-year electoral disasters for the party in the White House. But this is simply a more sophisticated form of wishful thinking. It misses the extent to which a Clinton reelection in 1996 would radically diminish the meaning of 1994. The victory of 1994 needs to be followed by victory in 1996.

That's the way realignments work. The Republican congressional sweep of 1894 was followed by McKinley's win two years later, launching an era of Republican dominance. Democratic pick-ups in 1930 (remarkably similar to those of the GOP in 1994) were followed by Roosevelt's election and the New Deal. The defeat of the Republican presidential candidate in 1996 would not bring New Deal-Great Society liberalism back to life; but it would mean the 1994 election was not the prelude to a fundamental conservative realignment. It would imply instead a future of chaotic political "de-alignment."

All of this, incidentally, still presumes that a Clinton victory would leave Republicans in control of Congress. But that's by no means certain. It's true that

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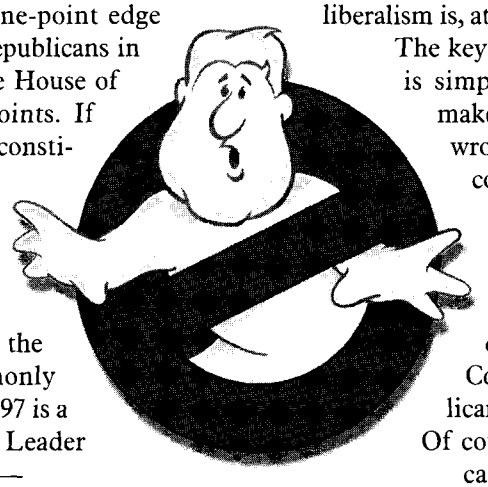
trends large and small, from long-term shifts in public opinion to the number of Democratic retirements in 1996, give the GOP a good chance to hold Congress. But what if Clinton wins by a comfortable margin, as current surveys suggest? What if the national congressional vote tracks the presidential vote—as has been the case in polls this year? What if Michael Barone is correct in suggesting that we may be returning to an era of partisan straight-ticket voting? Right now, as Clinton has moved to about a nine-point edge over Bob Dole, Democrats lead Republicans in most "generic" ballot tests for the House of Representatives by about five points. If those numbers hold, they would constitute a swing of about 10 points from 1994, and Democrats would recapture control of the House. And there are more vulnerable Republican senators, and fewer promising GOP prospects in the open Senate seats, than is commonly realized. A Speaker Gephardt in 1997 is a real possibility. And a Majority Leader Daschle is not out of the question—if Clinton runs well at the top of the ticket.



Will he? The bad news for Republicans is not only that Clinton's comeback in the last few months has been real, but that Americans have turned in a fairly significant way against the Republican Congress. In a poll last March, Americans said by 45 to 33 percent that the country was better off with a Republican rather than a Democratic Congress; today, in that same poll, Democrats have drawn even. Another survey last month found only 35 percent of Americans trusting Republicans to lead the country for the next four years; 42 percent trusted the Democrats. The erosion among senior citizens is particularly dramatic—Republicans have in the last year lost 26 points among Americans 50 and over, according to one Republican pollster, and those losses will be hard to recoup. The evidence suggests that if the 1996 presidential election turns on the personalities of Dole and Clinton, or on voters' judgment of the new Republican Congress, Clinton may well win. And the cause of Republican realignment and conservative reformation might not recover.

The good news, though, is that Clinton is deeply vulnerable. Despite leading Dole in polls, Clinton has not convinced most Americans he deserves reelection: Only about 43 percent of the voters want to see Bill Clinton returned to office. This is not a good number for an incumbent. Nor are the underlying public opinion numbers good for Clinton. As many voters call themselves conservative today as ever before (twice as many as call themselves liberal); and most Americans agree with the basic conservative propositions that our government is too big, our morality too lax—and that liberalism is, at least in part, to blame.

The key to this year's presidential election is simple. Republicans can win if they make this clear: If the country is on the wrong track—and polls suggest voters continue to believe this to be true—it's because of four years of a Democratic administration and four decades of Democratic control of Congress. After all, despite the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994, almost no Republican policies have yet gone into effect. Of course the Republican presidential candidate will lay out his positive agenda. But his main duty will be to do what every challenger must do: *Make the incumbent's performance the primary issue.*

THE GOP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE'S MAIN DUTY WILL BE TO DO WHAT EVERY CHALLENGER MUST DO: *MAKE THE INCUMBENT'S PERFORMANCE THE PRIMARY ISSUE.*

Clinton needs to be forced onto defense. He needs to be made to *defend*: to defend his administration's tax increases and unbalanced budgets, his own ethical problems and character flaws, his party's captivity to the abortion-rights lobby and the trial lawyers. The Democrats of 1932 offer an example: FDR spent more time explaining why Hoover had to go than laying out a detailed agenda for the country. And he spent relatively little time boasting about the achievements of the Democratic Congress of 1931-32 (even though it did, in fact, pass some proto-New Deal legislation).

This means the Republican presidential candidate must not fear the accusation that he is running a "negative" campaign. He must be willing to make Clinton the issue, rather than primarily defending the Republican Congress. And he must make the election an ideological one. He will, for example, want to remind the nation of the horror of the Clinton health care plan—rather than use Hillary Clinton as a witness in *support* of the Republican Medicare reform, as a recent Republican National Committee commercial foolishly does.

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The Congress could help with "show trials" highlighting particularly egregious Clinton administration policy and regulatory excesses. But if the Republican Congress is likely to be as unpopular as the Democratic president, the Republican presidential nominee will have to make the election primarily a negative referendum on the president.

Respectable opinion will denounce such a Republican campaign, just as it denounced Newt Gingrich a few weeks ago for citing the terrible murders in Illinois as evidence of the devastation of the welfare state. But when Gingrich zeroed in on "the moral decay of the world the left is defending," he hit a nerve. His insight—if more carefully expressed—should constitute the core message of the Republican presidential campaign.

The moral decay of the world the Clinton administration is defending is what the 1996 election should be about. The American people want that world changed. Bill Clinton stands in the way. The Republican candidate must make this clear. If he does, we will have a Republican president and a Republican Congress in 1997. Conservatives will then be able to worry less about criticizing the world the left has made. They will, at last, be able to get to work building a better one. ♦

Clinton As Tartuffe: How the 'Big Spin' Became the 'Big Lie'

By John Podhoretz

On the morning of November 13, Bill Clinton began the Budget War of 1995. What he said was not important—he was vetoing the first continuing resolution sent from Capitol Hill for his signature and offering some reasons why. What *was* important was the stagecraft—speaking to the nation from the Oval Office, holding the very pen that Lyndon Johnson had used to sign Medicare into law 30 years before, and wearing some very strange glasses. Perched halfway down his nose, right below the bridge, were these half-moon spectacles, the kind favored by teenage actors who need to appear middle-aged when they play Mr. Webb, the small town newspaper editor in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, in a high-school production. Mr. Webb, for those who have never had to suffer through the play, is a man of utter conviction, a leader of the community, a righteous fellow, whose gruff demeanor masks a heart of gold.

Nobody wears half-moon spectacles these days. Optometry has gotten more sophisticated. And, though they helped him look the part he was trying to play, Clinton clearly had no idea how to use them. He kept looking over the specs, or under them, to read the text, and just stumbled his way through. Soon thereafter, the half-moons were retired from public view, perhaps to Dick Morris's display case, but they had already served their purpose. They had helped establish the late-model President Bill Clinton—gray-haired, sober, attractive, the pious and principled representative of the little man. The kind of man who calls a spade a spade, who knows what's right and wrong and isn't afraid to speak his mind.

It's all a lie, of course. Like a teenager playing Mr. Webb, Clinton is a mere simulacrum of honesty, probity, and righteousness. It has been a rare and remarkable performance, because for two months now Bill Clinton has been saying things he knows to be untrue day in and day out—sometimes saying one thing in one meeting to congressional Republicans and then five minutes later sending out his lapdog vice president to deny he ever said it. This is not the Bill Clinton we have come to know, the one who seems to believe whatever he is saying whenever he says it.

For three years now, those of us on the right who do not reflexively hate Bill Clinton have been puzzled by the extreme vituperation the very mention of his name can cause in conservative circles. After all, Clinton is not George Mitchell, or Tip O'Neill, or Tom

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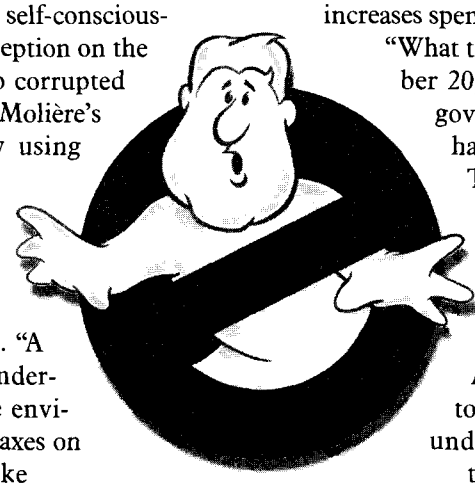
Foley, or Jim Wright—the Democratic party leaders of the 1980s committed to the demonization and, in some cases, literal criminalization of those in the opposite party. He is a politician without conviction, desperate to be liked, full of natural charm, whose purpose in life is to be all things to all people.

What has happened in the past two months is this: Clinton is no longer the likable rascal he seemed to be in his first three years. He has become a genuinely bad guy—someone who is deliberately, self-consciously, trying to put over a massive deception on the American people. He has been so corrupted by cynicism that, like Tartuffe in Molière's great comedy, he is consciously using piety as a tool.



"I will continue to fight for my principles," said the letter he sent Congress on November 13 detailing the reasons for his veto of the first continuing resolution. "A balanced budget that does not undermine Medicare, education or the environment, and that does not raise taxes on working families. I will not take steps that I believe will weaken our nation, harm our people and limit our future."

The next day, he said: "It is my solemn responsibility to stand against a budget plan that is bad for America and to stand up for a balanced budget that is good for America. And that is exactly what I intend to do."

Only his administration had no plan to balance the budget then, good or bad. And he knew that, but he lied, and he knew he lied. When his administration finally submitted a supposedly balanced budget on December 7, the Congressional Budget Office did the math and discovered that it would lead to a deficit not of zero in seven years, but of $115 billion. This came three weeks after he had signed a law committing him to accept a seven-year balanced-budget plan based on CBO projections. No matter; his spokesman, Mike McCurry, denied the law said any such thing, offering instead the head-shaking suggestion that only the final deal between Congress and the White House needed CBO approval. Like his boss, McCurry knows full well that at the beginning of his administration, Clinton insisted that all budget projections be CBO's because the White House's numbers were always cooked politically. They knew all these things, and they lied, and they knew they lied.

CLINTON IS NO LONGER THE LIKABLE RASCAL HE SEEMED TO BE IN HIS FIRST THREE YEARS. HE HAS BECOME A GENUINELY BAD GUY.

The Republicans, Clinton said on December 15, "would not even continue to talk unless we agreed right now to make deep and unconscionable cuts in Medicare and Medicaid"—knowing full well that the Republican proposal to cut the growth of the two entitlements is almost exactly the same proposal he had offered in 1993. What's more, that plan *increases* Medicare spending by 62 percent in seven years; his increases spending by only a fraction more.

"What they really want," he said on December 20, "is to end the role of the federal government in our life, which they have, after all, been very open about." That is a remarkable statement in and of itself—the sort of wild exaggeration that, were a comparable one made by Newt Gingrich about the Democrats, would be a three-day news story. And in any case, Clinton knew it not to be true. He knew full well that under the Republican plan the size of the federal budget in 2002 will be larger than it is now. This has actually been a severe disappointment to the libertarian wing of the Republican party, which was hoping for real cuts in the size of government, not merely a slowdown in its growth. He knew it, and he lied anyway.

Usually, at this moment in a political discussion, some cynic will go straight to the *Casablanca* quote about being "shocked, *shocked* to discover gambling going on here." This is politics. Politics is hardball. If you want a friend in this town, get a dog. And so on. Bill Clinton seeks political advantage by lying? So what else is new?

Here's what's new: This is *not* presidential politics as usual. It *is* campaign politics as usual, and campaign politics are different from the politics of governing. Candidates for office do spend months—years—lying through their teeth, promising everything to everybody and knowing full well that they are usually making promises they cannot possibly keep. "We just need to get to November," say the campaign managers; "you can't get anything done unless you're elected." If their electoral efforts are successful, politicians must then spend years trying to reconcile the responsibilities of governance with the lies they have told.

Becoming president usually forces a certain mea-

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sure of responsibility even on the irresponsible. That responsibility can lead presidents to disastrous error, as it did when George Bush agreed to increase taxes in 1990 and when Ronald Reagan decided to negotiate with the Iranians in 1986. But there was nothing craven in either action; it was taken out of a misguided sense of what would be best for the country.

Bill Clinton has, instead, embraced irresponsibility. When it comes down to it, he is not proposing a vision of Washington, or of politics, or of government, much different from the Republican vision. He doesn't oppose a balanced budget, which would be a defensible position, especially for a Democrat. No, he wants one—in four years, in ten years, in seven years, by CBO figures, by OMB figures, by whatever time-frame or vehicle he says he believes in today. His Medicare plan barely differs from the Republican proposal—a couple of dollars a month per recipient, $62 billion over seven years. He wants a tax cut, just a smaller one. He even wants a capital-gains tax cut, just a different one. This is the principle for which he is so determined to fight that he has vetoed appropriations bills and refuses to sign the continuing resolutions sent him by the Republicans? Of course not.

Up to now, Clinton has seemingly believed his spin; though he is prone to telling fibs (as Carl M. Cannon detailed in his article, "Bill Clinton's Pathetic Lies," in the Oct. 2 WEEKLY STANDARD), they have usually been remarkably unconscious ones. But that is not true of what he has done in the budget battle. Everything—*everything*—he and his people have said and done for the past two months has been a conscious deceit. The Big Spin has become the Big Lie.

And it has, so far, worked for him. His poll numbers rose; Republican poll numbers plummeted. It goes without saying that it would be a disaster for Washington, for the presidency, for the very idea of principled governance, if such raw, naked cynicism proved successful in the long run. Clinton's defeat in November is therefore essential simply to teach politicians the corollary to the lesson they learned from George Bush's loss in 1992. Just as no one can be a successful president by openly and nakedly going back on a firm and unambiguous promise ("no new taxes"), neither can a president be successful if he undertakes a knowing campaign of cynicism, deception, and fraud merely because he is so desperate to hold on to power that he will say anything. ♦

THE GOOD NEWS: WHY CLINTON WILL HAVE A TOUGH 1996

By Fred Barnes

George Stephanopoulos, the White House aide, lollygags through budget negotiations with Republican staffers at the Capitol, his feet propped up, acting as if he hasn't a care in the world, political or otherwise. President Clinton conveys a greater sense of urgency, but not much. He blithely took time off from budget talks to speak at Renaissance Weekend in South Carolina. Later, he sipped champagne and lingered at a New Year's Eve banquet until 2:15 a.m., chatting amiably.

Clinton believes he's on a political roll and thus has no need to wrap up a budget deal quickly. Indeed, the White House expects the advantage the president has gained over Republicans in the budget fight to continue right through election day next November. Clinton should know better. In politics, the future is rarely a straight-line projection of the present.

His own experience in Washington is proof of this. He stumbled early in his presidency, then got his budget and the North American Free Trade Agreement through Congress and finished 1993 in good political shape. But 1994, the year of health care reform, was a disaster for Clinton, and so was the first half of 1995. He rallied in the second half, endorsing a balanced budget, doing better in foreign policy, and benefiting from a reasonably strong economy.

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Now, Clinton is counting on four things that aided him in 1995 to pave the way for his reelection in 1996. They are: solid economic growth, the use of House Speaker Newt Gingrich as a political foil, the marginalization of the character issue, and a measure of success in Bosnia. However, all four of these may vanish in 1996.

With no budget deal, Clinton faces real economic peril. Should talks collapse, a correction in financial markets is inevitable since the current boom is based partly on the assumption that a credible agreement on a balanced budget will emerge. Also, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan insists interest rates will rise if there is no budget accord. In short, the economy could be tipped into recession, making Clinton's reelection problematic at best.

Even with a deal, Clinton may be in economic trouble. The expansion will enter its sixth year this spring, which means that by historical standards, a recession is overdue. Most economists are forecasting continued growth, but they invariably see the future as an extension of the present. One dissenter is economist John Mueller. He projects a weakening economy in the first half of 1996 and negative growth of roughly minus 2 percent in the second half.

Mueller bases this on his own economic model, but there are also indicators of a slowdown in the economy's recent performance. Manufacturing jobs are a sensitive barometer of economic cycles, and about 254,000 have been lost since March 1995. Moreover, the index of manufacturing activity shows the manufacturing sector is contracting. More broadly, the leading economic indicators have declined in seven of the past ten months. These trends suggest that a recession, while hardly certain, is quite possible.

To assail Clinton on economic grounds, Republicans don't need a recession. Some are already attacking Clinton for helping the poor through the Earned Income Tax Credit and the rich through the bull market, but leaving the middle class with stagnating incomes, job insecurity, and high taxes. Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, the GOP presidential front-runner, is expected to address this issue soon.

EVEN WITH A BUDGET DEAL, CLINTON MAY BE IN ECONOMIC TROUBLE. THE EXPANSION WILL ENTER ITS SIXTH YEAR THIS SPRING, WHICH MEANS A RECESSION IS OVERDUE.

Since mid-1995, Democrats have relished the contrast between Clinton and Gingrich. Their plan for 1996 is to run against Gingrich, who often comes across as combative and angry on TV. The trouble is Gingrich may be a non-person this year. While 1995 was Congress-centered—and focused almost entirely on the Gingrich agenda—1996 won't be. There is scarcely a Republican agenda at all. True, Republicans are debating tax reform and a flat tax, but they don't intend to move legislatively until 1997.

The truth is Clinton probably won't have Gingrich to kick around. The media will concentrate on the presidential race and Clinton's foe, most likely Dole. And Dole has begun differentiating himself from Gingrich on the budget talks. Attacking Dole as a Gingrich clone won't be credible. Besides, if Clinton concludes a budget deal with Gingrich, it will make subsequent attacks on the House speaker hollow.

That's one reason Clinton is so reluctant to reach a deal. He would have to give up both Gingrich and Medicare as supercharged issues, though a deal would have the virtue of neutralizing tax cuts and a balanced budget as Republican issues. There's another reason. If taxes and spending and Medicare are off the table, the character issue will move front and center. This terrifies Clinton.

Whitewater and Travelgate picked up momentum and press attention in late 1995, and more Senate and House hearings are slated. No telling what Special Prosecutor Kenneth Starr will uncork in Little Rock. The issue of Clinton's trustworthiness—he reversed himself in December on securities litigation reform to appease a special interest, trial lawyers—is a political vein Republicans have only begun to tap.

Finally, there's Bosnia. Despite White House poormouthing, Clinton has gained by pushing a firm military policy. The public has qualms about dispatching troops but likes a president to act decisively and lead the world. Now comes the hard part, getting American soldiers through without heavy casualties. Clinton may pull this off. But the odds on big trouble for him in Bosnia—as elsewhere—are far greater in 1996 than they were in 1995. ♦

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An End to Money Grubbing

Changing the Campaign Finance System

By David Frum

Suppose, just for a laugh, that we wanted to design the worst possible campaign finance system. Suppose we wanted to force politicians to think more about raising money than about legislating. Suppose, to compound things, we also wanted to ensure that the money arrived under circumstances that made it look as much like a bribe as possible. How might we do it?

In the first place, we'd make fund-raising as difficult and time-consuming as possible. Instead of holding one big annual fundraiser, or relying on a crash month of fund-raising in the autumn of election years, we'd force politicians to spend virtually the entire electoral cycle grubbing for money. Second, we would tempt politicians to raise money in ways that made them look like crooks. We might, for instance, make it dramatically more convenient to get money from narrow pressure groups than from persons motivated by a broad range of national interests. Finally, we'd open up blatant loopholes in the rules and create substantial incentives for exploiting them.

Of course, we wouldn't have to do any of these things: They've all been done already. And in the name of good government, no less.

American politicians must incessantly grub for money because the maximum legal donations have been set at $1,000 (for individuals) and $5,000 (for political action committees), amounts unchanged since 1974. For a big-state candidate for the House of Representatives—whose polling, consultancy, and advertising costs can quickly pass $1 million—that means tapping a minimum of 200 different donors every two years, and usually many more.

A competitive Senate race can cost upwards of $5 million. Bob Dole, Phil Gramm, and Lamar Alexander will each spend between $15 million and $20 million on his presidential nomination bid. Thus, before ever submitting themselves to the judgment of the voters, federal politicians must first win the approval of America's caste of political donors. It no longer suffices to find an eccentric millionaire or two to back you: A serious presidential aspirant must win the backing of more than 10,000 affluent givers. Which is why Dole, Gramm, and Alexander have spent their last pre-election year buttonholing rich people rather than explaining in detail the use they hope to make of the presidency.

Politicians very naturally find all this buttonholing irksome and wasteful. As a result, political action committees, which can give five times as much as individuals, have become the preferred source of money for busy congressmen and senators. But unlike individuals, who are motivated surprisingly often by disinterested civic-mindedness, political action committees exist exclusively to promote specific material interests. The chairman of Exxon might give $1,000 to a candidate because he agrees with the candidate's views on abortion, or defense spending, or federal aid to the arts. The various energy industry PACs, however, distribute their largesse on the crassest quid pro quo basis. And Congress has seized the opportunities presented by the PAC-finance system by hugely multiplying the number of subcommittees, ensuring that almost every congressman has some important quos to return for the PACs' quids. When reformers allege that the system of financing congressional elections has deteriorated into legalized bribery, they come uncomfortably close to the truth.

But even this is not the worst of it. For the finance system, perverse as it is, is perforated by loopholes almost designed to undermine the public's faith in the integrity of elections. The campaign finance rules ignore the vast sums, known as soft money, that donors give to the national and state Republican and Democratic organizations for "party building." Soft money is exempt both from donor caps—until bad publicity forced him to cancel it, President Clinton had been planning a springtime $100,000-a-plate dinner for the Democratic National Committee—and from federal disclosure rules. Probably the single

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largest sources of soft money are the trade unions: The big unions (especially the big public-sector unions) can mobilize armies of "volunteers" for favored candidates without triggering federal scrutiny.

Even more startling, a few lucky people can exempt themselves from the campaign finance rules by the simple expedient of spending their own money. A Ross Perot, Michael Huffington, or Steve Forbes can spend *unlimited millions or billions in pursuit* of office, cementing the already widespread perception that American politics is a rich man's game.

Altogether it can fairly be said that of all the liberal social reforms of the 1970s, the 1974 campaign finance laws may provide the most spectacular illustration of the law of unintended consequences. Intended to reduce the influence of big money in congressional and presidential elections, they instead force every federal office-seeker, from the president on down, to waste vast amounts of time begging for driblets of money. The millionaire money-men who used to finance elections have been banished, it's true, but only to be replaced by Rolodex-men who can pull together the big shots of a hundred American cities for fund-raising receptions and dinners. Similarly, by favoring gifts from political action committees over donations from individuals, the 1974 reforms diminished the importance of conscientious citizens, and maximized the importance of ad hoc economic interest groups.

THE MILLIONAIRE MONEYMEN HAVE BEEN BANISHED, REPLACED BY ROLODEX MEN.

In a hideous addendum to the law of unintended consequences, most of the campaign finance reforms now being promoted would only make matters worse. Limits on campaign expenditure, as favored by liberal groups like Common Cause, would only inflate the significance of "soft money." Public funding of campaigns, the pet reform of more hot-headed liberals, would put officials of the federal government in charge of deciding who should—and who shouldn't—count as a legitimate candidate for public office. Banning PACs, without any offsetting changes, would slash the maximum donation from $5,000 to $1,000, effectively forcing politicians to spend five times as much of their time grubbing for money as they do now.

Liberal political reformers imagine that by capping campaign spending America could somehow purify its politics, replacing vulgar and deceptive radio spots with lofty Lincoln-Douglas-style debates and serious-minded presentations of positions in 30-minute unpaid public service announcements on television. The far likelier effect of campaign expenditure caps, though, would be to invite cheating and to deprive less attentive voters even of what little information they now get to guide their vote. Presidential contests, remember, are governed by state-by-state spending caps. Candidates who can afford to do so frequently violate the limits on spending in Iowa and New Hampshire, happily trading a big Federal Elections Commission fine the next year for a crucial primary win now.

Not that tighter enforcement would make things any better: By reducing the amount of campaign advertising, strict caps would probably depress voting statistics even further—perhaps to the abysmal levels recorded in municipal elections, where voters similarly often lack the most rudimentary information about which candidate stands for what. More ominous still, countries that have taken expenditure limits seriously (Canada is one) have found themselves banning advertisements, posters, and leafletting by independent individuals and groups during elections in a desperate attempt to equalize spending by all sides.

And the proposal currently being mooted by certain conservatives—requiring politicians to solicit money only within their own district or state—would achieve the most perverse effect of all. Imagine yourself a congressman from, say, Wyoming. As it is, you depend heavily on energy-industry PACs for campaign funds. But you can always hope to mitigate the power of your main donors with gifts from PACs, individuals, and groups around the nation who care about your vote on non-energy legislation: trial lawyers or tort reformers, advocates or opponents of abortion, protectionist auto companies or dealers in imported cars. Take away those sources of money, and you're pretty much locked in the room with the coal companies. A ban on out-of-district money would compel Wisconsin congressmen to serve the dairy industry, Washington congressmen to serve the aerospace industry, southern Florida congressmen to serve the sugar industry, and Manhattan congressmen to serve banks and investment companies, even more slavishly than they do now.

Real campaign finance reform would attempt to reverse the mistakes of the past 20 years, rather than march even further down an ever more crooked road. Real reform would begin with a very simple question: What are we trying to accomplish?

Almost everyone agrees that politicians should spend less of their time raising money, should receive the funds they need in ways less likely to obligate

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them to their donors, and should generally behave in ways that assure the public that the political system operates in an honest and above-board way, with no special favors granted. Reformers have thus far tried to achieve these worthy ends by piling restriction on restriction. Their projects have ended in disaster. It's time to try something new.

Let's begin by realizing that campaigning for office in a colossal country where most people rely on television for their information will always be costly. Congressional districts average 500,000 residents. Even if we limited spending to a buck a person, that represents a big sum of money.

Still, the need to raise large sums need not, of itself, turn politicians into full-time money-grubbers. If they could raise their money in bigger chunks, they could spend much less time at the task. Which is why the most vitally needed of all campaign finance reforms is—paradoxical though it will sound to some—a sharp increase in the maximum permissible personal donation. A $10,000 limit on individual gifts for elections to the House and a $100,000 limit on gifts for senatorial and presidential elections would balance the two imperatives of campaign finance reform: making fund-raising less time-consuming, on the one hand, while minimizing candidates' dependence on any single donor. And to make sure the policy stays effective, the limits should be indexed for inflation.

Once large donations could be made directly to the candidate—which every candidate prefers—the evil of unaccountable and undisclosed soft money would tend to wither away.

This proposal would go a ways toward mitigating the problems created by the exception permitting wealthy individuals to spend unlimited amounts of money on their own candidacies. That exception derives from a 1976 Supreme Court ruling, *Buckley* v. *Valeo*, and so cannot easily be repealed. But it probably can—and should—be limited. Already, self-financed presidential candidates who exceed Federal Election Commission spending caps lose their access to federal matching funds. Congress should test how much further the court will permit such restraints to go. Possibly candidates who chose to finance themselves could be rendered ineligible for gifts from anyone else. That would face future Ross Perots and Michael Huffingtons with a stringent choice: Play by our rules or play by your own—and take the political consequences.

In addition, the time may have come to re-examine the ban on direct contributions by trade unions to political candidates. Donations by trade unions and corporations to politicians have been banned since the 1940s, on the theory that union and corporate funds are held in trust for union members and corporate shareholders, many of whom will hold different political views from their leaders or managers. This concern is still a real one in the case of corporations. But in the 1989 *Beck* decision, the Supreme Court ordered unions to inform their workers of the proportion of their dues expended on political causes and to give members the option of requesting a rebate of that money. Post-*Beck*, union donations begin to look much more representative of their members' wishes than they used to.

At the same time, action should be taken against trade union soft-money contributions. Hotels are not allowed to "volunteer" free reception space, free food, and free drinks to political candidates; by the same principle, unions should not be allowed to "volunteer" their members' unpaid services as campaign workers. Individual unionists should have the same right to donate their time to a cause as anyone else. But beyond a certain level—say, when more than 5 percent of a candidate's volunteers come from any single union local—it becomes disingenuous to suggest that these union workers are spontaneously offering their services. Past the minimum threshold, the market value of volunteer work by union members should be considered a donation from that union and should be subject to the same $10,000 and $100,000 limits that bind everyone else.

Whenever the time comes to revisit the campaign finance laws, Congress ought to try to implement one last reform, perhaps the most important of all, but unfortunately the hardest to codify into law. Americans must somehow liberate themselves from utopian visions of how democracy works. A democratic system of government gives everyone, no matter how ignorant, a voice in the selection of political leaders. That is right and just. But it also implies that democratic politics can never attain the standards of high-mindedness and fair debate that liberal campaign reformers yearn for.

EVEN SPENDING LIMITED TO A BUCK A PERSON WOULD REPRESENT A BIG SUM OF MONEY.

The huge size of America only aggravates the problem. So long as America remains a democracy, politicking will have to be simple and it will have to be loud; which means it will have to be vulgar and it will have to be expensive. No reform can fix that. Campaign reformers who try will almost certainly succeed only in making matters worse. ♦

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Briefing for a Descent into Hell: Today's Campus

By Jeremy Rabkin

Cornell University was the setting for one of the most notorious episodes of campus upheaval during the great era of campus upheavals in the late 1960s. Armed students took over the student union building in the spring of 1969, while thousands of other students rallied in their support. Top university administrators persuaded an anxious faculty senate to capitulate to student demands for the sake of peace. A quarter century later, Cornell administrators are still buying peace, though the threat to their peace is very much changed. These days the main challenge comes from feminism. Feminists do not carry guns. They wield charges of "sexual harassment."

Cornell's experience is, to be sure, merely an instance in a larger trend. On campuses throughout the nation, "gender issues" have eclipsed all the old activist causes. Cornell's nervous administrators, too, have their counterparts throughout higher education. But Cornell activism seems a bit more flamboyant and its administrators a bit more cowed and craven. As in the 1960s—when Cornell was one of the rare places where activists finally took to guns—the latest Cornell story gives some telling examples of how dangerous things can get when university officials try to play it safe.

So, in recent years, Cornell officials have allowed feminist activists to define "sexual harassment" in startlingly broad terms. I was made to understand this at the outset of this trend, when I gave a lecture in my constitutional law course on "privacy" cases, including the 1987 Supreme Court ruling refusing to strike down Georgia's law against sodomy. In response to a question, I ventured a few words in explanation of why voters in Georgia or elsewhere may support such laws even though they are never enforced. Within two weeks I received a letter from a feminist colleague, an officially designated "sexual harassment counselor," informing me that some unnamed students had complained that my remarks were insulting to homosexuals. She notified me that, on the basis of the students' account of what I had said, she had concluded that my lecture had created a "hostile work environment" for students and was therefore within the campus definition of sexual harassment. Fortunately for me, no punitive action was taken. But I was put on notice: I was under surveillance.

This can be a somewhat unnerving experience. Four years ago, the faculty of Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences (or rather the activist rump of the faculty that rallies for official meetings) adopted a set of procedures for dealing with complaints of harassment. To reassure complainants against retaliation, these procedures allow complaints to be stored in a "locked file" by faculty harassment counselors, with no notification of the accused professor. Then at some later time—which may be quite a few years later, as there is no statute of limitations—the faculty harassment counselors may activate these complaints, along with others that may have accumulated, and slam the unsuspecting professor with formal charges based on a "long history" of "harassment."

What is most remarkable about this system is that the harassment counselors will not reveal anything about the files to a professor inquiring about his standing, not even whether the harassment counselors do have files on that nervous professor. The FBI is required to share its files with citizens who inquire about what information it has gathered about them. But Cornell's faculty harassment counselors maintain that even abstracted summaries of their files might be used by devious professors to figure out which students had complained about them and then retaliate against those students.

Quite a few professors worry about what may be in those files. One male professor was badgered so persistently by a mentally unbalanced female student that he obtained a court order against her, requiring her to keep her distance. She then charged him with sexual harassment. No formal sanctions were imposed in the end, but he worries, understandably, about how this has been written up in the secret files. Another male professor, in a different department, was troubled by repeated sexual overtures from a female student who had signed up to write a senior thesis under his direction. The professor told her to find another adviser. She charged him with "sexual harassment." Again, no

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punishment was levied, but how the episode was written up in the secret files is something the harassment counselors refuse to divulge.

The response of administrators to all this has been true to form. They do not want to know. The dean of the faculty acknowledged that "an instructor's concern that unanswered complaints were piling up in a locked box could create a chilling atmosphere for an expression of views deviating from the accepted norm." Nonetheless, he expressly declined to endorse the right of professors to be informed about the existence of secret files (even with names of complainants and details of complaints withheld) because, given even such limited openness, "a putative victim might well be inhibited from depositing a complaint . . . for fear of retribution." Even this carefully balanced statement was held to disqualify this gentleman from presiding over faculty meetings at which the college harassment procedures might be discussed. Don Randel, the dean of the Arts College, was even more cautious. When he received letters protesting the excessive secrecy of the locked files last year, he declined to respond at all. That is the true Cornell spirit. This summer, Randel was promoted to provost of the University.

But if administrators are indifferent, the faculty has discovered how dangerous it can be to be charged with "harassment" in the current climate. Consider the case of James Maas, who was charged and found guilty under the Arts College procedures. Maas is an immensely popular professor whose introductory course in the Psychology Department draws some 1,500 students each year. An award-winning researcher on sleep disorders, Maas makes instructional films on the subject. Two students who worked on his film crew complained to a harassment counselor that they found his manner bothersome. The harassment counselor rewrote their complaints to make them sound more severe. Two other students were recruited to fill out the charges. With one exception, all the charges amounted to complaints about excessive displays of affection—social hugs and kisses, bestowal of gifts. Maas, a man in his 50s, still has the warm manner of an earlier, more innocent era. No one disputed the fact that Maas has displayed the same affectionate manner toward hundreds of other students over the years, none of whom had found it offensive or threatening. Indeed, the complainants themselves had not told him that this behavior was offensive to them. All of the incidents in question took place in front of witnesses, either his own wife or the parents of the students or other students, and none of the other witnesses saw anything amiss in his conduct.

There was one other complaint, however, regarding an alleged incident from seven years in the past. A student claimed that Maas had deliberately "touched" her breast on one occasion at that time. Maas vigorously denied the charge, and the faculty Professional Ethics Committee acknowledged that there was no evidence to confirm it. Nonetheless, the Ethics Committee, dominated by faculty members with special concerns about "harassment," found that this incident, combined with displays of affection, suggested an "egregious . . . pattern over time"—a pattern of one episode. Maas was given a hearing but not allowed to have a lawyer represent him during the hearing, nor to be present when his accusers were questioned (on the grounds that this might upset them). The harassment counselor who presented the case demanded that Maas

Michael Ramirez

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be fired, but the formal penalties were successively whittled down to a salary freeze and an admonition against giving gifts to his film crews.

But the real penalty was the devastating publicity, which was leaked in bits and pieces to the campus newspaper (and then picked up by the national media). It was said that Maas had been charged with "breast grabbing" and other offenses and found guilty by a faculty committee. The *Cornell Sun* demanded that he be fired and expressed outrage that he was still allowed to address alumni gatherings since he had been found "totally unfit to represent the university." This fall a feminist group posted notices protesting that Maas had been found guilty of "sexual assault" and then given a slap on the wrist. The university made no effort to correct the record. Maas was on his own.

Well, not quite. The American Association of University Professors criticized the procedures used against Maas as a "denial of academic due process." With the aid of the Washington-based Center for Individual Rights (with which I am associated), Maas filed a lawsuit, seeking $1.5 million in damages. Cornell responded to both challenges by claiming that it would have accorded full due process under established university grievance procedures if "severe sanctions" had been contemplated. The procedures adopted by the Arts faculty and employed in the Maas case were characterized as merely "investigative" and quite sufficient in a case where no serious penalty had actually been imposed.

This has turned out to be the university's first line of defense whenever its harassment watchdogs get out of hand. Two subsequent cases illustrate the pattern. In April, James Aist, a professor of plant science in the Agriculture School and a conservative Christian, posted a notice on a campus bulletin board filled with offers to sell computers, motorcycles, typing services, and so on. Aist's notice was unusual: It offered counseling for individuals seeking to be "cured" of their homosexuality. A group of gay students took offense and staged a sit-in at his office. The university promised to investigate Aist. Students filed charges that his notice had subjected them to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, to sex discrimination, and even to religious discrimination—the latter on the grounds that Aist was "trying to impose his religious views about homosexuality" on them.

The campus Office of Equal Opportunity spent seven months ostentatiously "investigating," busily questioning the professor's colleagues and students while refusing to tell him, for much of that period, what the precise accusations against him were. The office would not let the matter rest with the undisputed fact that Aist's poster had appeared in a "public forum." As an assistant dean explained, "Aist may have a right to free speech but the students have a right not to be offended." The investigation was called off only when Aist hired a lawyer and threatened to sue. But, as Cornell administrators saw it, no harm was done by months of intimidating "investigation" for expressing a politically incorrect view: No formal sanctions were imposed in the end.

In the most recent case, four Cornell freshmen were found to be circulating an e-mail message, "75 Reasons Why Women (Bitches) Should Not Have Free Speech." It was offensive and sophomoric, but then the authors were not even old enough to be sophomores. It was not obviously more offensive than lists circulated by women ("10 Reasons Why Cucumbers Are Better than Men"). And this lockerroom humor was circulated only to friends of the four students. But someone began sending it around to a wider circle, and the list soon spread across the country through the broadcast power of the Internet. Cornell was deluged with indignant protests from feminists at other colleges. The university's vice president for public relations issued a statement piously denouncing the students for having "damaged Cornell's good name" and assuring the public that the matter would be thoroughly investigated.

The ensuing investigation by Barbara Krause, the campus judicial administrator, determined that the students had not actually broken any rules. Their communications were private. They had not sent them with intent to harass but with intent to entertain and no one who received the list from them had actually complained. The complaints came from third parties. Fortunately, a Solomonic decision was reached. The JA issued a statement that the students were not technically guilty of breaking any rules but simultaneously announced that these students had "volunteered" to attend "counseling" on "rape education" and "gender roles" and to perform 50 hours of community service to demonstrate their "sincere regret." Privacy? Free speech? No problem! The students "volunteered" to be punished. And, as the JA explained, "Cornell does not have a hate speech code."

Apparently somebody in the upper reaches of the Cornell administration decided that matters were getting a bit out of hand, though. In late November, Provost Randel—who, as Arts College dean, had insisted he did not "believe the [Arts] Procedures to be fundamentally flawed"—presented new university-

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wide procedures, that would supplant those of the Arts College and other units at Cornell. The new procedures contain the same encompassing definition of sexual harassment (including "verbal conduct" that "has the effect of . . . creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive learning environment") and offer no protection for classroom speech—but do offer a specific disclaimer to authorize "sexual behavior" between faculty and students which is "welcome and consensual." Administrators know their priorities. There is even less due process for accused professors in these procedures, which allow penalties to be imposed whenever there is "reasonable basis to believe" that harassment has occurred. But all "investigation" will now be removed from faculty harassment counselors and centralized in the hands of the Office of Equal Opportunity—those expert officials who did so well in the Aist case. And all final authority will rest with the deans. What administrators care most about is keeping control away from faculty feminists who don't pay enough attention to public relations. When faculty members in the Arts College proposed to abolish the locked file system, the dean insisted that files could not be destroyed but must instead be turned over to administrators. The new procedures do not mention secret files but also do not disclaim willingness to consult the old ones. And like the old Arts College procedures, these two have already been criticized by the American Association of University Professors as a threat to academic freedom.

Tenured professors, beset by overwrought harassment counselors, may not win much sympathy from people out in the real world, where employees can be fired at any time for offending the customers or offending fellow employees. But other employers must worry about demoralizing their employees, if only for the sake of productivity. University administrators, whose "product" is so hard to define, worry much less about fairness to their faculty employees; they seem altogether preoccupied with appeasing the loudest activists on campus. In universities, where due process and free speech ought to be of special concern, they can be cheerfully forgotten in the latest ideological struggle and the latest administrative maneuver to cope with it.

It is hackneyed to say that universities are training the next generation of American leaders. But it is still true. Based on my experience at Cornell, I would say the message that the next generation is absorbing will not be radical feminism—despite the vast resources devoted to teaching and propounding it. Instead, today's students are likely to retain the cynical lesson that when confronting zealots, it is best to duck or perhaps to maneuver—but never to draw a line or stand on principle.

When elemental principles have no authority in universities, what future will they have in the country over the long run? Never mind, say today's university officials: Just keep those tuition checks and government subsidies rolling in. A university is an expensive business. And please, please don't sit in at the administration building on campus or else we might have to throw a few more scholars and teachers to the wolves. We would like to avoid that—if it isn't too costly. ♦

The Disappearance of the 'Vital Center'

By Arch Puddington

In 1968, I attended a Black Power rally in Austin, Texas, at which the most popular slogans were "Arm Yourself or Harm Yourself" and the simple but effective "Get Guns." Today the words sound absurd. But remember: That same year, riots broke out in scores of American cities in the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and there were many who feared (and, on the left, hoped) that the hitherto spontaneous "urban insurrections" might evolve into organized rebellion under the leadership of committed revolutionaries. The Kerner Commission claimed there had been 164 "racial disturbances" in 1967, and the toll was to prove almost as great in 1968.

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The frightening events on America's urban streets suggested that violent racial rupture was a real possibility.

The Revolution, of course, never arrived. Race riots became a rarity after 1968, and relations between blacks and whites settled down to the state of tense normality that has prevailed ever since. The swaggering ultra-militancy that set the tone for the horrible last years of the sixties, vividly on display that night in Austin, gradually faded as blacks devoted themselves to entering the schools, occupations, and other institutions that had previously excluded them. It would not be surprising to learn that the Black Power champions who preached aggressive self-defense in Austin eventually joined the system as teachers, lawyers, or even as elected officials.

In many of the most important respects, then, the current environment represents a vast improvement in America's racial atmosphere. Yet while racial integration has moved ahead in fits and starts, the mood of black America, as indicated by the statements of its most prominent political and intellectual personalities, is in some ways more hostile and angry than during the most polarized days of the Black Power era—reflecting an alienation from America, a rejection of "white-controlled" institutions, and a deep pessimism about the future. At a recent public forum in Harlem, two respected black intellectuals, Alvin Poussaint and Cornel West, declared off-handedly that blacks faced the threat of "genocide" at the hands of white reaction—not some vague form of cultural suppression, but physical elimination such as was suffered by the Armenians and, as West put it, "our Jewish brothers and sisters" earlier this century. This nightmare vision of a racial holocaust echoes the predictions of racial annihilation frequently advanced by legal scholar Derrick Bell, whose best-known work is a fable in which black Americans are sold as slaves to visiting space aliens. Moreover, the predictions of race war routinely expressed by the younger generation of black intellectuals have been accompanied by a major, and disturbing, shift in the character of black leadership. Figures who were once regarded as marginal and extreme have become not merely acceptable as spokesmen for black aspiration; they have, in the figure of Louis Farrakhan, become a dominant presence.

Neil Shigley

The rise of Farrakhan and others means we can no longer automatically console ourselves with the reassuring commonplace that, despite what they hear from their orators, black people do not believe they are the target of racial annihilation, do not regard Jews as their oppressors, and do continue to identify with the American Dream of middle-class prosperity. There is a disturbingly large constituency for Farrakhan's paranoid fantasies and even for the glib prophecies of genocide issued by black intellectuals. Polls show that many blacks believe that AIDS was deliberately introduced into the black community, that whites have singled out "strong black leaders" for elimination, that the white power structure has a conscious "Plan" to destroy black neighborhoods by allowing the drug trade to flourish in the inner city. Perhaps even more unsettling is the fact that it is precisely the most successful blacks—those who have entered the professions and the corporate world—who tend to be the most pessimistic about the present conditions and future prospects of black America.

There are many and complex reasons for the deterioration in the caliber of black leadership and the overwrought quality of today's racial rhetoric. But certainly an important part of the explanation can be traced to a collapse of what once formed the Vital Center of black political and community life. The Vital Center consisted of an impressive network of black-owned and black-run institutions, ranging from churches and newspapers to funeral parlors and fraternal organizations and even to trade unions representing black workers. At the core of the Vital Center, however, was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and its shrewd director, Roy Wilkins. The NAACP was often damned by radicals and even by the liberal media as too bland, too accommodationist, too much a part of the Establishment. Yet it was the NAACP that for many years was the principal representative of black Middle America, the hard-working, church-going, community-conscious core which constituted the most authentic voice of racial pride and attainment—the missing voice in today's ill-tempered debate.

It was Wilkins, Whitney Young of the National Urban League, and a few other like-minded figures who stood firm for the civil rights movement's integrationist goals when they were under attack from the

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advocates of separatism. Wilkins also publicly rebuked Martin Luther King when King attempted to radicalize the struggle for racial change by linking it to the growing movement against the Vietnam war. Wilkins was convinced that the cause of racial change would be jeopardized if the civil rights movement became identified with the unpopular and unpatriotic New Left, a belief that the course of events was to vindicate.

The NAACP made its share of mistakes, but even when it followed the wrong course, as it did in the case of busing, it often did so for worthy reasons. Busing, we now know, has actually impeded integration by accelerating the pace of white flight from urban schools, and has played a major role in the alienation of white Americans from activist government. Yet even here, the NAACP was initially acting on the premise that the future of black America would be enhanced by its thorough integration in a white-dominated institution; thus even this misguided policy represented an embrace of American society and not its rejection. At the same time, Wilkins and other NAACP officials were among the earliest critics of the federal government's policies of racial preference, which they opposed for both political and moral reasons.

The personalities and organizations associated with the Vital Center also set the tone for the marches, public manifestoes, and alliances which carried forward the tradition of black protest. They made sure that the events and statements had an interracial complexion, and they were careful to exclude the extremists and demagogues—a group that, until recently, included Louis Farrakhan.

Many of the key institutions of black community life were, ironically, seriously weakened by desegregation. But important segments of the Vital Center might have survived had the civil rights movement pursued a strategy that concentrated on black economic and educational achievement. A focus on integration into the economic system would, to be sure, have rendered the traditional civil rights organizations obsolete, including the NAACP. But new institutions would have emerged in their place to analyze the specific racial challenge presented by the post-industrial economic order and to stimulate community development, while treating the struggle against discrimination as a subsidiary concern.

Instead, the energies of the post-civil rights leadership were focused in the worst possible direction: toward the struggle against racism both here in the United States and around the world. By identifying white prejudice as the principal obstacle to racial equality, as expressed through the institutional bias of corporations and political parties and the foreign policy goals of the United States, the black leadership assured a permanent state of racial cold war in which failure to eliminate inequality stood as decisive evidence of white guilt.

The emphasis on white racism led to demands for unpopular and polarizing compensatory programs like affirmative action. More broadly, the fixation on racism invited black estrangement from American society. It also had a chilling effect on intellectual debate. Given the collective judgment of the racial leadership that America was consciously excluding blacks from their rightful place, it required something bordering on an act of dissent for a prominent scholar or politician to point to evidence of racial progress, to urge blacks to assume more personal responsibility, or to insist that something other than prejudice was responsible for the disparities in wealth and education.

Ultimately, the various institutions of the Vital Center made their accommodations with the prevailing dogma. Black newspapers, which once functioned as arbiters of community morality, soon fell in line with the new world view. They blamed Jewish professors, Korean grocers, or other convenient scapegoats for black America's problems; demonized Reagan, Bush, and Gingrich as enemies of progressive humanity; and concocted unconvincing alibis for corrupt officials like Marion Barry. Black clergymen intensified their involvement in politics and not infrequently adopted an accusatory, anti-white tone that stood in depressing contrast to the inclusive and hopeful language that marked Martin Luther King during his most influential years. Meanwhile, the NAACP slid from one crisis to the next, its major preoccupation being the expansion of preference programs for the emerging black middle class.

The pace of the Vital Center's decline has accelerated in recent years. In 1993, Farrakhan was excluded from participation in the 30th anniversary of the

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fabled March on Washington. With the Million Man March, he has achieved near-consensus recognition as the supreme leader without having modified his opinions to any discernible extent. To drive home the point that the correlation of forces had shifted, Farrakhan made certain that the speakers list at the Million Man March included a generous representation of radicals and nationalists, so that nationally prominent figures like Jesse Jackson, Rosa Parks, and Charles Rangel shared the platform with a bizarre array of separatist cult leaders, peddlers of "African" cures for AIDS, and rank anti-Semites.

At the same time as the liberal Vital Center was experiencing steady decline, a vaguely socialist, Marxian tradition demonstrated a surprising resilience among black intellectuals and even some black political figures. To be sure, few blacks actually joined the American Communist Party or supported the state socialism of the Soviet Union. But Marxism need not refer exclusively to a belief in an orthodox brand of Communism; for many blacks, Marxism signified a conviction that racial inequality derived from a combination of racial and class oppression, that the elimination of racial inequality would require a major transformation of capitalism, and that black Americans were joined to the colored peoples of the world as victims of white, imperialist oppression. While a black Marxist might reject the Soviet system because of its authoritarianism, he would probably sympathize with socialist "experiments" in Cuba, Nicaragua, Angola, or other Third World countries. Black Marxists were seldom anti-white; they were often anti-American and took special pride in their uncompromising hostility to American foreign policy objectives.

Although Martin Luther King remained a strong critic of Communism, he was, near the end of his life, increasingly drawn to the notion that social justice demanded a wholesale "restructuring" of the American economy, a code word for democratic socialism. He began referring to the ghetto as a "system of internal colonialism," and asserted that just as white racism was responsible for the shattered lives of the black poor in America, white racism was also the driving force behind an imperialist foreign policy which maimed and killed people of color all over the Third World.

King developed these views during confused and angry times. But after his death, when the rest of America moved steadily away from the ideological excesses of the 1960s, black politics shifted in an even more extreme direction. On domestic affairs, the Congressional Black Caucus continued to press for urban Marshall Plans long after it had become clear that America could not sustain the old policies of tax-and-spend. And on foreign and defense matters, the racial divide became even more pronounced. Each year the Black Caucus issued an alternative budget which invariably called for a massive transfer of funds from military spending to the social welfare budget. Not surprisingly, the document was almost universally ignored, except by a few of the most left-leaning members of Congress.

Moreover, the black leadership embraced a Third World perspective that led to a near-total rejection of the Reagan administration's anti-Communist policies. The Third World leaders favored by the black leadership were often pro-Soviet authoritarians, such as Grenada's Maurice Bishop. Leaders who cooperated with America, such as Jamaica's Edward Seaga, were treated as pariahs. This hostility to American interventionism outlived the Cold War. Opposition to the Gulf war was almost unanimous within the black leadership and was often justified with the most hackneyed formulations of the "No Blood for Oil" variety. The black political Establishment was unmoved by appeals by high-ranking black military officials; indeed, many prominent blacks exhibit discomfort when confronted with evidence of black progress in the military. They seem to prefer rubbing shoulders with black boxing champions to fraternizing with black generals. The glitter may be one reason, but another surely is that while black success in boxing doesn't tell us anything all that interesting about America, black success in the military suggests that, in one area at least, America has treated its black citizens with fairness and dignity. In 1989, for example, Louis Farrakhan found it necessary to call Colin Powell, then just appointed as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a race traitor.

Not surprisingly, the black leadership has encountered problems in adjusting to the global explosion of

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capitalism and the movement towards privatization and market solutions in the U.S. Here again, the black elites find themselves trapped in a time warp, lagging behind the old East European Communist rulers in their acceptance of the new realities. Once an advocate of self-help and entrepreneurship, Jesse Jackson today ranks as a bitter critic of the global trading system and the market in general. Cornel West, one of the more prominent younger black intellectuals, calls himself a democratic socialist and speaks of a "market-driven shattering of black civil society."

West and others take pride in their anti-capitalism, which they believe links them to the prophetic, dissenting tradition of the civil rights struggle. In fact, resistance to the present economic order is the antithesis of the civil rights movement's overarching objective of full participation in the entire spectrum of American life. The anti-capitalist message reinforces an all-too-prevalent defeatism among black men, who justify their lack of enterprise on the grounds that the system is rigged against them.

To a certain extent, the rise of Farrakhan may signify a decline in black Marxism. While preaching a vitriolic brand of anti-Americanism, Farrakhan is seldom critical of the market or of capitalism, and as the leader of the Nation of Islam, he presides over an extensive network of small businesses, most notably a private security force which has won contracts from public housing authorities in several cities.

But blacks have never been as meticulous about ideological consistency as the white left, and have demonstrated considerable flexibility in reconciling anti-capitalist prejudices with a racial nationalism that prizes business ownership. The intellectual result is what has been called Rainbow nationalism, a toxic brew that unites a feeling of solidarity with people of color throughout the world with a uniquely American sense of black grievance.

The person who most clearly embodies the spirit of Rainbow nationalism is neither Farrakhan nor Jesse Jackson, but Benjamin Chavis, the former national director of the NAACP. In his earlier career, Chavis was the consummate man of the radical left. He railed against capitalism, denounced Israeli "imperialism," spoke out for the Sandinistas, and played a leadership role within a network of organizations aligned with the American Communist Party. At some point, Chavis's vocabulary shifted from an emphasis on the class struggle to the omnipresence of white racism. Police racism, corporate racism, Bush administration racism, the racism of the Gulf war—Chavis condemned them all, and went one step further by discovering an entirely new form of racism: environmental racism.

Environmental racism may be one of the great non-issues of our time. But Chavis's identification with two morally impregnable causes quickly elevated him to a position of political respectability; he was named to the new Clinton administration's transition committee on environmental affairs and, shortly thereafter, selected to lead the NAACP. His tenure there was brief and stormy, and he was fired after little more than a year for budgetary irresponsibility and charges of sexual harassment. His dismissal was also interpreted as a rejection of his radicalism, reflected in his attempts to broker "peace summits" among youth gangs, the establishment of NAACP chapters in foreign countries as an expression of internationalist solidarity, a covert campaign to magnify the influence of radicals and nationalists in organizational affairs, and a move to forge a de facto alliance with Louis Farrakhan.

It now appears that Chavis understood something about the volatile nature of today's racial politics that his critics may have missed. By aligning himself with Farrakhan, Chavis has staged his own comeback. He served as chief organizer for the Million Man March and as Farrakhan's liaison to the mainstream black leadership. As reward, Chavis has been placed in charge of a new entity, the National African-American Leadership Summit.

The leadership summit is billed as a big-tent organization that will bring together nationalists, radicals, and traditional integrationist groups like the NAACP and Urban League. But there can be little doubt that the summit is meant to solidify Farrakhan's position as race leader, to ensure a place within the leadership ranks for the new generation of "community activists," such as Al Sharpton, and possibly even to draw in such disreputable figures as Leonard Jeffries and other Farrakhan camp followers who traffic in anti-Semitism and conspiracy-mongering.

A favorite Chavis theme is the necessity of racial unity, by which he means unity around Farrakhan. Farrakhan's legitimacy is no longer subject to debate among those engaged in race politics. In previous times, the existence of a healthy Vital Center would have ensured that appeals to bigotry, organizational irresponsibility, and political immaturity would have been denounced by name. Never before has the absence of the great racial middle ground been the cause for so much regret. ♦

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What Happens When Reporters Make War

By Robert D. Novak

An early defining moment of the American experience in Vietnam came on January 11, 1963, when Adm. Harry Felt, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, was conducting an airport press conference following a visit to Saigon. As the American correspondents in general and Malcolm Browne of the Associated Press in particular bombarded him with critical questions, Felt glared and then snarled: "Why don't you get on the team?"

Felt's snap remark has reverberated through 30 years of remembering and recasting the catastrophe of Vietnam, repeated in thousands of barroom conversations by journalists and recorded in dozens of articles and books. The story is now retold in William Prochnau's *Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles* (Times Books, 546 pages, $27.50).

What Felt said to the 32-year-old AP reporter encapsulates the conflict between the U.S. authorities and the ambitious young journalists covering the distant war that was then barely a front-page story. Their dispute over the role of the correspondents would exert an unmeasurable but significant impact on the outcome in Vietnam and the long shadow it casts over a generation of American life.

Prochnau, a well-known reporter and novelist who did two hitches himself as a newsman in Vietnam, does not waste much time pondering these implications. His book covers only 1961-63, ending with the assassination of South Vietnamese president Ngo Dinh Diem. He repeats an oft-told story of governmental bungling that, in all honesty, has been better told in many earlier books (especially David Halberstam's *The Making of a Quagmire* in 1965). What's different about Prochnau's book is his chronicle of how Browne, Halberstam of the *New York Times*, Neil Sheehan of United Press International, and the other young correspondents covered Vietnam.

The book has been favorably reviewed. H.D.S. Greenway, editorial page editor of the *Boston Globe* writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, called it "a rattling good yarn." Martin Walker, Washington bureau chief of *The Guardian* (London), writing in the *Washington Post Book World*, referred to "a riveting account" and the author's spinning "a beguiling legend."

Frankly, I am not sure that a nonjournalist would find Prochnau's story rattling, riveting, or beguiling. He is dealing in newspapermen's "war stories" that I, for one, have heard—usually over a drink or two—from the time of my first newspaper job almost 50 years ago. Whether dealing with politics, crime, or war, they invariably include: womanizing, boozing, and defiance of authority (both the Establishment figures that the reporters are covering and those wretched, stupid desk editors). The reporter always emerges as the somewhat ribald hero.

Prochnau's story begins with Halberstam's predecessor as the *New York Times* correspondent in Saigon: the stuttering, profane Homer Bigart, then nearing the end of a legendary reporting career. Prochnau elevates him to mythic proportions but does not pretend to clothe Bigart in objectivity. He is described as arriving in Vietnam at age 55 with a "disregard for generals from MacArthur to Patton." Fritz Nolting, the embattled U.S. ambassador in Saigon, "was convinced that Bigart had come to Vietnam with a hopeless prejudice and, of course, he was right."

Bigart, who has been depicted by his acolyte Halberstam as an old-time police reporter who never read books, came to a conclusion about Vietnam "within weeks" of his arrival, according to Prochnau. "Hating the place the moment he got there and hating it every day he stayed" because of the climate and the secrecy, Bigart in his dispatches written for the world's most important newspaper "was casting . . . support for Diem as foolish and the strategic importance of this distant and backward place as dubious."

"The young correspondents hero-worshipped him," Prochnau writes. Bigart had taught them a lesson: "He had made it pro forma once again to challenge authority, a lesson that had been lost on many of the reporters of his generation in the heat and planetary danger of the Cold War."

That new lesson was well learned by young journalists who, at the very beginning of their

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careers, earned fame, fortune and Pulitzer prizes from the war. Halberstam and Sheehan are likened by Prochnau to "two overgrown college boys, determined to use the school newspaper to do in the football coach and have fun in the process."

So, they were naturally offended by Felt's displeasure that they were not part of the U.S. government "team" in Vietnam, but he was right: They certainly were not on the team. Browne had declared U.S. diplomats to be persona non grata, refusing even to talk to officials at the embassy. "The press, adversary of all, plays on no one's team," Prochnau proclaims.

But that was not true, as Prochnau himself admits. Halberstam was clearly on the team of the Buddhist radicals who did so much to destabilize the Diem government. The correspondents, Prochnau notes without censure, "had become total and unabashed advocates" of ousting Diem. At a Fourth of July party at the U.S. embassy, Halberstam refused to drink a toast to the president of South Vietnam, snapping: "I'd never drink to that son of a bitch." Diem's death is described "as a moment of great triumph" for the correspondents.

This attitude set a pattern for the thousands of American journalists who would follow the handful who had been in Saigon in 1961-63. The road to personal success was clearly marked, and it did not go the direction of cooperation with either the U.S. military command or embassy. American officers swore that in future wars, they would make sure that members of the news media were kept far enough away to prevent them from poisoning the well—a pledge that was truly fulfilled in the Gulf war.

For the young correspondents as for their chronicler, the villains were famous visiting journalists—Joseph Alsop, Marguerite Higgins, and Richard Tregaskis—who, like the Kennedy administration, viewed Vietnam as a crucial encounter in the Cold War.

Columnist Alsop, childishly ridiculed by the resident correspondents as "Joe All-Slop," is thought by Prochanu to have goaded John F. Kennedy into going to war in Vietnam because Alsop "would lose no more of his precious Asia" to the Communists. Tregaskis, the author of *Guadalcanal Diary*, was 26 when he covered the Marines in the Pacific, the same age as Halberstam in 1963. He rebuked his fellow *wunderkind*: "If I were doing what you are doing, I'd been ashamed of myself." As for Higgins (the renowned World War II and Korean War correspondent), Prochnau writes: "The reporter in her had hardened into a Cold War ideologue."

Indeed, Prochnau's only serious criticism of the young correspondents is that they were too much children of the Cold War. He contends they missed "the biggest story of all—that all these well-meaning, we've-got-the-answer, do-good Americans had no business being in Vietnam at all." They came to this realization, he says, much later, in the fullness of years.

Once Upon A Distant War time and again restates the "no business being in Vietnam" dictum as an axiom, one requiring neither documentation nor argument. In this same axiomatic category is Prochnau's certainty that the war was unwinnable and that a Communist victory was assured. Neither assertion is challenged widely in the political community today, but both ought to be.

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Whatever the validity of the Vietnam commitment, it did not derive from Joe Alsop's nagging his friend Jack Kennedy. It is clear from numerous sources that, after his humiliation at the hands of Nikita Khrushchev at their Vienna summit in 1961, Kennedy felt the U.S. must take a stand some-

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where against the rolling tide of international Communism, and the best place was Vietnam. To prevent another small country from falling under the Red yoke was not a matter for much debate three decades ago.

Supporting the argument for intervention in Vietnam was the widespread perception of expansionist tendencies by Mao Tse-tung's China, a view confirmed by Chinese activity around the world. The 1965 Chinese Communist insurrection in Indonesia might well have succeeded had it not been for the American commitment in Indochina.

The concept of the unwinnable war emerged from the reporting of the young correspondents in the early years. Unfamiliar with the country and unable to speak its language, they came to sweeping conclusions about Vietnam based in no small part on what they had learned from scattered conversations with low-to-middle-level U.S. advisers. Long before the U.S. sent half a million men, Halberstam had pronounced Vietnam a quagmire. When he was leaving at the conclusion of his tour in 1963, an Army captain told him: "You're going home just in time. This whole place is collapsing." In fact, the "collapse" was 11 years away and was far from inevitable.

This deep-seated pessimism pervaded the Saigon press corps—including even Robert Shaplen, the distinguished Hong Kong-based correspondent for the *New Yorker*. Shaplen did not run with the pack of American reporters and is mentioned by Prochnau only in passing, but his major book on Vietnam was titled *The Lost Revolution*—the loss of the battle for hearts and minds.

In truth, that battle never was resolved among the people of Vietnam, who suffered at the hands of both sides. However, once President Lyndon Johnson decided to pour in American troops in substantial numbers in 1966, there was no chance of a Communist victory in the guerrilla war.

In 1967, Halberstam paid his only return visit to the war and wrote an article for *Harper's* asserting nothing much had changed in the past four years and that the war was still unwinnable. Peter Braestrup, the foremost critic of the American news media in Vietnam, wrote in 1977 that Halberstam was relating "second-hand Saigon horror stories" of past corruption and incompetence. "He did not see the bloody, semi-conventional war on

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the DMZ [demilitarized zone] or live with U.S. troops or ARVN [South Vietnamese army] in the Highlands," wrote Braestrup, who suggested Halberstam "had fallen into an old newsman's vice, that of rewriting his past stories." It was a different war in 1967, where the competency of the U.S.-South Vietnamese forces was markedly improved.

In 1970, John Paul Vann told me that, on a recent visit to the U.S., he had talked with Halberstam and tried, without success, to explain to him how much things had changed in Vietnam. As a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, Vann in 1963 established a symbiotic relationship with Halberstam. The officer provided the reporter with inside information, and the reporter provided the officer with an incomparable sounding board. But seven years later, they were no longer on the same wavelength. "Dave still is thinking in terms of '63," Vann told me.

Vann had returned to Vietnam as a senior civilian in 1965, and he told me one night while camping out with ARVN forces in the Central Highlands that he had informed his superiors that there were two possible ways to win the war. The first option was for the U.S. to declare war on North Vietnam and use all means short of nuclear weapons, including a million-man expeditionary force. The second option was for American ground troops to go home and instead fully arm and supply ARVN to win or lose the war.

Vann clearly preferred the second option, but Washington took neither course. President Johnson's warmakers had no intention of waging all-out war, for fear of provoking a Soviet and/or Chinese military reaction. Yet they would not turn the war over to the Vietnamese, ignoring pleas by Vann and others to fully supply M-16 automatic rifles to ARVN infantry units still using the obsolete M-1 Garand. Not until President Richard Nixon in 1969 launched his program of Vietnamization was Vann's second option belatedly pursued.

In the meantime, reporting by American journalists undermined support, both at home and abroad, for the U.S. effort. There was no more glaring example than the dispatches from the esteemed Harrison Salisbury of the *New York Times* during a two-week visit to North Vietnam in late 1966 and early 1967

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that gave the impression that the U.S. was willfully bombing civilian targets. The assessment by Guenter Lewy in his studiously objective *America In Vietnam* (1978) has received all too little attention:

"Only after the articles had appeared and received extensive attention all over the world did a small number of persons learn that Salisbury, in effect, had given the authority of his byline to unverified Communist propaganda and that the *New York Times* had printed this information as though Salisbury had established it himself with his own on-the-scene reporting."

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But Salisbury was a hero to the journalists in Saigon and Washington in 1968 when Hanoi waged its Tet offensive to win the war with a combined assault by Vietcong and North Vietnamese units on population centers—a tacit admission that the Communists could not take over South Vietnam strictly by using guerrilla tactics. Braestrup, in his magisterial two-volume work, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*, reached this blunt conclusion:

"Rarely has contemporary crisis-journalism turned out, in retrospect, to have veered so widely from reality. Essentially, the dominant themes of the words and film from Vietnam . . . added up to a portrait of defeat for the allies. Historians, on the contrary, have concluded that the Tet offensive resulted in a severe military-political setback for Hanoi in the South."

But that conclusion by historians never was accepted by the news media. The false perception of Tet changed the political climate in Washington so much that support for the war steadily drained away. Furthermore, just as the negativism by the press corps in covering Tet in 1968 was influenced by the heroes of Prochnau's tale, so was future coverage of Vietnam shaped by the faulty impressions of Tet.

Regrettably, there has been no comprehensive Braestrup-like study of pre-Tet or post-Tet coverage. When North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam in 1972, it was scarcely noted by the news media that the Hanoi politburo had tacitly admitted the failure of guerrilla warfare and that the much despised ARVN—under Vietnamization—fought well against the Northern legions.

Nor has the rest of the dreary story been well reported. Frantic to end the war, Nixon pressed the South Vietnamese to sign a peace treaty by giving President Nguyen Van Thieu secret assurances that U.S. military force would redress the balance if the North broke the peace. But Watergate forced Nixon from office, and an impotent President Gerald Ford lacked the means and the will to fulfill his predecessor's commitment. If there had been any chance that the ARVN could successfully resist on their own without American air support the second conventional invasion from the North in 1974, it ended when Congress strangled the South Vietnamese forces by halting all appropriations.

Can a line be drawn from the reportage of the young correspondents in 1962-63 to the tragic ending in 1975? A closing note by William Prochnau says the 5,000 reporters who followed the little band he chronicles "deserve their own story." Indeed, they do, but it should be done by a Peter Braestrup, a Guenter Lewy, or some other scholar free of romantic illusions. ♦

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Books

What a Piece of Work Is Mann

By J. Bottum

He wanted so much for it all to be true. The Romantics had told him that the world makes no sense in modern times—the Modernists would later tell him it never had—but everyone told the German novelist Thomas Mann that the artist is the strong man who hammers out a heroic meaning for this world of weakness and disorder. And he wanted so much for it to be true.

He knew, of course, that it wasn't. Mann's stories contain some of the most scathing attacks on the "heroic artist" ever written, from the pretentious and self-satisfied novelist Gustave von Aschenbach in the 1911 novella *Death in Venice* (lured by the sensuous beauty of a Polish boy to linger in miasmatic Italy) to the cold, proud, and mad composer Adrian Leverkühn in the 1948 novel *Doctor Faustus* (whose brilliant musical powers are heightened, corrupted, and at last destroyed by the syphilis that infects him just as the Nazis infect his German fatherland).

But this is perhaps our problem with Thomas Mann nowadays, and the explanation for why his reputation as a great, magisterial writer of traditional novels seems to have faded in recent years. Art in our time has been raised to such absurd moral heights—and yet simultaneously dropped to such absurd moral depths—that we do not seem to bother much anymore with the sort of ethical questions that gave Mann his great and serious purpose. The fading of Thomas Mann's fiction from our literary view is a fading of artistic *compunction*, a fading of the notion that the writer must constantly subject the act of writing itself to the rigors of moral analysis.

When Mann died in Zurich in 1955 at the age of 80, few had any doubt that he had written for the ages. In the long working career granted to very few writers, he had stood in public view as an acknowledged master for more than 50 years—from the publication of his first major novel, the immensely popular *Buddenbrooks* in 1901, through *The Magic Mountain* in 1924 and the Nobel Prize that seemed to follow as its logical tribute five years later. He followed *The Magic Mountain* with the quartet of novels *Joseph and His Brothers* in the 1930s and early 40s, *Doctor Faustus* in 1947, and on to the *Confessions of Felix Krull, Confidence Man*, an early short story expanded into a novel in 1954.

Among general readers, who now, 40 years later, can bring to sharp focus a picture of the man? Or recall in sharp detail one of his novels' characters? Mann is too strong a writer to blend easily into the cloud of unread, unregarded Edwardian worthies, but the edges of his memory seem to have blurred. Even his standard short works—*Death in Venice* or *Tonio Kröger* (a classic 1903 portrait of the artist as a young man)—seem to have fallen off college reading lists, and his lesser known novels—the 1909 *Royal Highness*, say, or 1951's *The Holy Sinner*—have disappeared from easily available editions.

Perhaps John E. Wood's new translation of *The Magic Mountain* (Alfred A. Knopf, 706 pages, $35) will help bring the novelist back into view. This, his greatest work, tells the story of Hans Castorp, a young German engineer who comes on a three-week visit to his cousin at a tuberculosis sanitarium in the mountains and stays for seven years. Castorp is "a bourgeois, a humanist, and a poet," as the mountain-top seductress Clavdia Chauchat declares, "Germany all rolled into one, just as it should be!" Mann was very much in charge of his fiction, and his deliberate literary compunction ensures that his novels all tend to be obvious fables, social allegories. The symbolic meaning of his characters was never far from his mind while he wrote, and he has—and had, even in his own lifetime—the reputation of clinical detachment from his characters.

Mann had in fact a general reputation for detachment from everything but his art. In a pair of extraordinary letters written during the First World War to his brother Heinrich and his publisher, he seems actually to praise (for providing him with a device with which to end *The Magic Mountain*) the war that was slaughtering millions and destroying the same high European culture that he needed to exist for his writing to have purpose. Mann's greatest weakness as a writer was his difficulty in finding plots, and he ruthlessly annexed private events in his family's lives for incidents in his stories and novels—deeply hurting his children, his brother, and his wife's family, for his stature as a public figure in Germany inevitably led to speculation in the press about the originals for his characters.

But he could also be very funny: "My books," he once observed, "are full of fun and music, and I am essentially a humorist." *The Magic*

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Mountain was begun, Mann said in later years, as a sort of comic companion to *Death in Venice*: a short and lightly fictionalized account of a visit he made to a sanitarium, during which a slight flu was diagnosed as tuberculosis requiring an extended and expensive stay. But the novel grew and grew in his hands, taking 10 years and 700 pages to reach its conclusion in Hans Castorp's departure from the sanitarium to fight in the war. Along the way, it became a book about many things: a young man's initiation into life and love, the scientific pretense of medicine in treating a disease it didn't understand, the desperate gaiety of social life in a hospital for the dying, the strange and almost timeless passage of time as experienced by those withdrawn from the "real" world, and (according to an interpretation of the novel by the American poet Howard Nemerov, singled out for praise by Mann himself) the universal quest for the grail of self-knowledge.

Despite its enormous ambitions, however, *The Magic Mountain* both holds together and remains comic throughout its 51 chapters. Indeed, though Mann resented interpretations of the novel as a satire, the energy of the humor is what unifies *The Magic Mountain* and drives it forward to its serious purpose. Wood's new version of the novel enlivens what was deadened in the old Helen Lowe-Porter translation: the surprising wit and style, the sheer verve and joy in writing with which Mann unfolds his fable of European culture immediately before 1914. Even the highly symbolic characters, the Jewish-Jesuit reactionary Naphta and the Italian humanist revolutionary Settembrini, seem almost real people. Wood decided wrongly, I believe, to translate the extended French conversation of the famous Walpurgis Night seduction scene, for much of the humor and sexual charge in the encounter with Madame Chauchat over a hard, thin lead pencil depends upon the French within the German: *Parler français*, Hans Castorp sighs, *c'est parler sans parler*. ("To speak French is to speak without speaking.") But with his general success at capturing the humor of *The Magic Mountain*, Wood has given a new chance at life in English to what may be the last great traditional novel to attempt in a serious way to express the unity of European culture.

Chas Fagan

Perhaps the clearest way to get at the serious purpose of *The Magic Mountain* is to remember that all great novels take place at the same location: at the intersection of culture and narrative, at "the dark and bloody crossroads" (in Matthew Arnold's much-quoted phrase) where the battle over culture's self-understanding gets fought out. Born in 1875—to the generation of German-language writers that included his own brother Heinrich, Franz Kafka, Robert Musil, and Hermann Hesse—Mann faced all the same problems of culture and narrative that drove his contemporaries to make the Modernist turn into absurdity, irony, and self-reference. He had "the gifts, but not the naivety, of a Balzac or a Dickens," Hermann Hesse wrote in a perceptive 1901 review of *Buddenbrooks*. But Mann refused for the most part to become a Modernist in his fiction and sought instead the old-fashioned power of the artist to speak the moral truth about man and culture.

"Humanism is humiliated or dead," he wrote in the early 1930s. "Consequence: We must establish it again." Thomas Mann represents for us, I think, the last: the last true believer in high culture, the last heroic humanist, the last great writer to pledge his faith to the traditional novel—if

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only it be pursued with enough stern perseverance, enough single-minded conviction, enough scrupulous compunction.

And yet—as Donald Prater's widely acclaimed new biography, *Thomas Mann: A Life* (Oxford University Press, 554 pages, $35), reminds us—high culture, for all its greatness in Germany, did not prevent the slaughter of World War I, the decadence of Weimar, and the horror of the Nazis. For a brief period after World War II, it was the fashion for American and British pundits to mutter dark generalities about the "German soul" and sketch intellectual genealogies that claimed nearly every historic German artist or thinker as a father of Hitler. Thanks in part to the love many Jewish refugees kept for high German culture, the fashion mercifully passed quickly. (Among the most often accused, Hegel, Wagner, and Nietzsche seem to have recovered completely, though Heidegger has once again come under a shadow in recent years.)

Only in the most attenuated sense did German high culture cause Germany's national sins in the 20th century—but the fact nonetheless remains that it could not stop them. Mann may represent the last good German, the last humanistic German, the last high German of the line of Goethe, Beethoven, and Kant: "Where I am, there is Germany," he declared upon his arrival in America as a refugee from the Nazis, and though some laughed at the grandiosity of the statement, many thought it obviously true. But he represents as well the inability of everything that was best in Germany to resist the triumph of everything that was worst.

In his new biography, Prater takes on a difficult task in convincing us both that Mann's mostly forgotten political writings deserve serious attention and that Mann was a closet supporter of leftist causes. Vague predictions of eventual European union and an unfocused wish for a reunited Germany after World War II were more common among non-Communist intellectuals than Prater seems to realize, and they reflect no special prescience on Mann's part. During the early years of the Cold War, the elderly novelist undoubtedly said some mildly silly things about "finding a middle ground" between Communism and capitalism, but any attempt to depict him as a lover of socialism is doomed to failure.

In his political writings, Mann seems, in fact, that weakest and most delicate of all things: the non-religious *social* conservative, digging in his heels at each new cultural decline and crying, "Enough!"—all the while trying to explain the last decline. Mann had some religious grounding, and Protestantism plays a significant role in *Doctor Faustus* as the novelist seeks to express with religion (and especially religious music) the world from which Germany, in the person of the fictional composer Leverkühn, fell away.

But for the most part, Mann sought in the preservation of high Enlightenment culture the religion he lacked—and as it slipped away, he felt himself, like Germany, more and more adrift. "Germanness is freedom, education, universality, and love—that they don't know this, does not alter it," he had Goethe declare in a fictional dialogue, *The Beloved Returns*.

His early conservatism, manifesting itself in support for the Kaiser and the 1914 German war effort, gave way in the 1920s to support for the Weimar Republic. After Mann expressed his encouragement for an "immoral" play written by his son, one German newspaper carried the satirical advertisement: "For sale by Thomas Mann, very cheap: a well-preserved conservative philosophy . . . and a father's cane, scarcely used, exchange possible for a Jacobin's cap in good condition." But in truth Mann never ceased to fight for each new status quo as a defense against still worse changes. In one sense, his stand against the Nazis deserves great praise—as a non-Jew he could, like Heidegger, have stood in well with the new movement anxious for the prestige of famous supporters. But in another sense, his rejection of Nazism was almost an inadvertent consequence of his constant rejection of every change in German society.

Even in his fiction, Mann always tends to speak of times past and social worlds long dead. *Felix Krull*—in which a con-man turns out to be (as all con-men must be) a strongly conservative supporter of a stratified society—is a delicious parody, but it is at last a parody of a 19th-century European world that had disappeared long before Mann came to write of it.

The Magic Mountain, the novel that explained the intellectual causes leading Europe to World War I, was finished only in 1924. *Buddenbrooks*, *Death in Venice*, and *Tonio Kröger* all have deeply nostalgic resonances. Only in the biblical and Egyptian fantasies of the *Joseph* novels is Mann set free from his desperate desire that things not change. The good, dull narrator of *Doctor Faustus*, writing in Germany at the end of World War II, applauds the defeat of the Nazis, but the story he narrates is a story from the past set among two German social worlds—the rural peasants and the urban artists—that the Nazis and the war swept away.

Prater gives a well-written, accessible, and lively account of the

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novelist's long life as a celebrated writer. He notices the influence of the family history of suicide—two of Mann's sisters, a sister-in-law, and two of his children—while properly refusing to make it a catchall explanation of Mann's difficult personality. He shows us Mann's private life, the original incidents and personalities Mann turned into fiction, and, best of all, he shows us Mann's 50 years as a public man: quoted in the press on every and any topic of passing interest, but maintaining under difficult circumstances the integrity that led him at the peak of his fame to accept exile rather than Nazism. He shows us as well the self-conscious and melancholy sense of being the last—the last high German, the last Enlightenment figure, the last writer of artistic compunction—with which Mann always lived. His life work, Mann told one biographer, is "nothing more than a rapid recapitulation of the myth of the Western world and its cultural heritage before . . . the final curtain falls."

Though Mann's political judgments were often naive ("The Nazis as a party I hold to be a mischief that will soon pass," he told an interviewer in 1930), his diagnoses of the deep causes of Germany's diseases were often correct, and he fought those diseases heart and soul. His cultural fights were always lost, however, even as he gained personal fame for fighting them.

The chance exists that Mann's fiction offers art a way back from the abyss of Modernism, and Wood's new translation of *The Magic Mountain* and Prater's biography may help in that endeavor. But for the reunified Germany that has already begun to dominate the European Union, Mann provides, I think, no believable way back from the shame of the Nazis to the glories of what was German high culture. Those glories are gone forever. ♦

Books

A Cockeyed Optimist's Sober Warning

By Christopher Caldwell

In his columns for *Newsweek* and the *Washington Post*, Robert Samuelson challenges, with crystalline clarity, the economic clichés of the day. So it's worth noting that his first book, *The Good Life and Its Discontents: The American Dream in the Age of Entitlement 1945-1995* (Times Books, 432 pages, $25), is not about the economy as such. It is about why Americans are so dismally dissatisfied with what is basically a healthy (and improving) economic picture. Samuelson blames the entitlement sensibility, which infects not only those who feed off the government programs that bear the name, but also those who think that the market will inexorably improve living standards without anyone having to exert himself all that much.

Samuelson is to economics what Ben J. Wattenberg is to the social sciences—a cockeyed optimist, ever inclined to explain why the "good news is the bad news is wrong." Samuelson has never preferred German or Japanese industrial policies to the American Way, even when those other economies were riding high. He sees more promise than peril in the global economy, and views the recent increase in income inequality with less alarm than most economics reporters. But for Samuelson, an economy is a mirror of a culture, and there's no way to take a rosy view of the lazy-mindedness and personal irresponsibility the entitlement culture has produced. The only way we can maintain anything like our historic economic performance, in his view, is for Americans to reassert their individualism and constrain their runaway entitlements. That, alas, is grounds for a bleak forecast—even bleaker, perhaps, than the one Samuelson arrives at.

First, the good news. While the U.S. economy has been growing at only 1 percent a year since 1973, it's ticking up again, to about 1.5 percent as we pass mid-decade. Industrial and farm production has grown, even if employment in both sectors has fallen. And the waning *relative* importance of farming and manufacture (both unstable sectors of the economy) leaves us less subject to such shocks as the Great Depression. Our economy is 15-20 percent more efficient than Japan's, if you go by worker productivity. As for income inequality, much of it is merely a reflection of family breakup, which not only produces lousier habits among workers but also doubles the number of households without doubling the number of incomes.

Why, then, does the economy, as Elvis Costello used to sing, "look like a luxury and feel like a disease"? The story begins with the aberrant economic growth of the immediate postwar years, which created the impression that perennial economic problems had been abolished and that affluence would continue indefinitely. It was, says Samuelson, a "revolution in domestic psychology and politics."

How this revolution was carried

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out is just as important as what happened under its aegis. Corporatism was crucial. World War II legitimized big government for the first time, and big business—in a compliant mood after being harried throughout the New Deal—was its proxy. The preponderant position of corporations allowed the U.S. to create a nearly comprehensive European-style welfare state by franchising it out through regulation, not legislation.

This regulatory regime has allowed us for decades to pretend our government is not socialist; even today it makes it impossible to say just how big our government is. The corporate system was also inefficient over the long term—profit margins fell from 16.9 percent on average in the 1950s to 8.7 percent in the 1980s—but those inefficiencies were masked by inflation and heavy borrowing.

Keynesian attempts to make the economy recession-proof led to inflation and rigid bureaucracy. The failure of Keynesianism was, Samuelson writes, the "most fateful and damaging of the postwar economy." And before that failure became clear, "we had *reconstructed our politics* on the false assumption of unbounded material prosperity."

That is, the federal government had created the time bomb that is the public-sector welfare state. The popular liberal canard that specific programs for the needy make up a trivial part of the entitlement explosion, and that attempts to curtail them are just "bashing the poor," is baloney: In 1994, means-tested programs cost $177 billion, or 13 percent of the budget. But the corollary assertion—that everyone, including the middle class, is implicated in the welfare state—is undeniable. "Payments to individuals" rose to 57 percent of the federal budget in 1995. Fifty-one percent of American families—including 30 percent of the most affluent fifth of Americans—receive at least one benefit. The government backs loans to half of all college students.

Robert Samuelson

Kent Lemon

Most dangerously, the elderly now receive a third of federal outlays—40 percent if you take out money spent on debt service, close to half if you also take out military spending. Social Security, as currently administered, is not merely an entitlement—it is *welfare*. The contemporary recipient has paid enough into the system to support himself for the first few years of retirement; the rest is gravy, a handout as surely as any AFDC check. While welfare-state demagogues frighten voters with stories of the aged poor, Samuelson notes, "younger and poorer workers increasingly support (through payroll taxes) older and wealthier retirees." To finance baby boomers in even less grandeur when they retire, we would need either to increase taxes by 50 percent or to triple the deficit.

Samuelson's linking of the "entitlement" a corporate employee receives by getting a generous pension and the "entitlement" of a welfare parasite would at first seem a trick to portray himself as a moderate, someone who cannot be accused of "bashing the poor." But he is up to something far more subtle. Our "reconstructed" politics are only partially about the economy, and the economic situation we find ourselves in cannot be understood without a look at the roles the government has arrogated to itself in other realms. Here is where Samuelson's book comes together as a brilliant synthesis on the culture of entitlement.

"American government and politics seem almost suicidal," Samuelson worries. "They compulsively generate public distrust." The business of apportioning fairness puts government in the permanent position of mediating between interest groups. It is this, Samuelson thinks—not Watergate, not Vietnam—that has caused widespread disillusionment with government. Equalizing opportuni-

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ty, whether through affirmative action or welfare, imposes heavy and unfair costs on certain sectors of the population. So the government inevitably justifies its policies as moral imperatives—*necessarily* casting those who pay for the system as villains. The unattainability of such abstract goals as equality means that government is constantly overpromising, and the distinction between a promise that can't possibly be kept and an outright lie isn't much of a distinction. Government isn't "worse" than it was 30 years ago. But without much exaggerating, one can say that it is a fraud. And if the government is a fraud, the economy is a con game.

What does this tell us about the national character that we tolerate, even encourage, such a regime? Samuelson puts a great deal of faith in American optimism, individualism, and love of freedom. But it is impossible to read his long bill of particulars against the entitlement sensibility without thinking he's merely putting a brave face on a spiritual crisis. "America is defined by its distinctive bedrock beliefs," Samuelson says, "which, if widely discredited, would shake society to its foundations." That such a discrediting is well underway is in fact the conclusion to which his argument inexorably leads. It is a conclusion that he doesn't dare speak.

The entrepreneurial spirit once carried with it the idea of social betterment and transformation, but it no longer does; Americans would trade the Internet for safe streets in a heartbeat. Canniness, or cunning, or whatever talent the entrepreneur uses to identify a new need (or vulnerability) may be admirable and necessary, but it is not optimism. Anti-government rhetoric may lower taxes temporarily, but if it does nothing to diminish existing government benefits, it is not individualism.

Samuelson professes to be sanguine about Americans' prospects for avoiding the debacle that the entitlement sensibility may be leading to. He calls for balancing the budget and getting entitlements under control. That would be a start. But if he's wrong, we will see either the tripled deficits or the 50 percent tax hikes he warns of early in the book. We will then likely find ourselves left with Samuelson's bleaker scenario: in which "the inertia of our present situation is so powerful that it cannot be stopped short of some tidal-wave event." ♦

Music

No Alternative

By Mark Gauvreau Judge

I am no longer hip. The agency of my discovery was a radio station that specializes in "alternative" rock: An abrasive song by some angry grunge band came on during a drive, and I immediately punched to a classical-music station. Only a few years earlier I had been on the rock 'n' roll cutting edge, but now I prefer soul, classical jazz, zydeco, even big band—anything but the sound of screeching young men with their flying guitars.

On the way home, I stopped at a bookstore and picked up *The Spin Alternative Record Guide* by the writers and editors of *Spin* magazine. If I was going to give up the hipster ghost, I needed a sign that "alternative" music, the music that defines 90s cool, no longer spoke to me. Reading the *Spin* guide makes it obvious that "alternative" rock isn't really about music at all. The editors claim that "just as, generationally, baby busters have found it difficult to distinguish their identities from boomers—no war protests, no indisputable defining experiences—alternative rock lacks the proud boundaries that rock's original tradition kept so well guarded." Despite this disclaimer, the editors nonetheless make a stab at a definition by way of comparison with baby-boomer, or "old-style," rock:

> More than jazz, blues, country, or any other musical genre, old-style rock was defined by a mass appeal you didn't have to sneer at, the mythic popularity of the universal youth music that turned the repressed fifties into the rebellious sixties. . . . Alternative rock, on the other hand, is anti-generationally dystopian, subculturally presuming fragmentation: it's built on an often neurotic discomfort over massified culture, takes as its archetype bohemia far more than youth, and never expects that its popular appeal, such as it is, will have much of a social impact.

"Anti-generationally dystopian"? "Subculturally presuming fragmentation"? This is the kind of pseudo-academic drivel that has been the stock of rock critics since the birth of rock criticism in the 1960s. It's an attempt to both legitimize and romanticize rock, make it a psychologically and socially vibrant art form, and maintain the appropriate posture of rebellion against the plastic middle-class culture.

It's also appallingly ignorant. If any music is anti-generationally dystopian, presumes fragmentation, and expresses discomfort over massified culture—in other words, expresses feelings of fear, hopelessness, and alienation that transcend generational, economic, and racial

Mark Gauvreau Judge has written for the Washington Post *and various magazines.*

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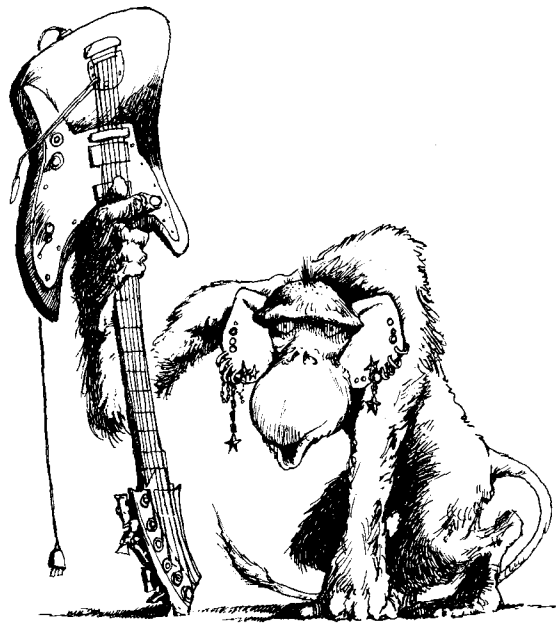
barriers—it's not alternative rock idols Hole, the Nine Inch Nails, or the Butthole Surfers, but blues, jazz, and country traditions that the *Spin* guide never mentions. But unlike alternative rock, these genres also express joy, spiritual ecstasy, and lovestruck jubilation, which is probably why the *Spin* guide banishes them to the dustbin of history. If music that expresses happiness is the meat of most "mainstream" music fans, it's poison for what MTV calls "Alternative Nation."

According to *Spin*, alternative rock came into being in the 1960s, with the first "dissenters from the rock norm." The movement included iconoclast Frank Zappa and heavy metal godfather Iggy Pop. But the real founding fathers were the Velvet Underground, four art school disciples of New York pop-art guru Andy Warhol, who, the guide says, broke new ground by addressing topics like heroin and homosexuality that "even the [Rolling] Stones were only comfortable hinting at." The Velvets were the antithesis of the upbeat pop of the Beatles and the Beach Boys, with live shows featuring bizarre "happenings" influenced by absurdist, nihilistic movements like Dadaism.

The Velvets paved the way for the punk bands that sprouted in New York in the 1970s, artists like the Ramones, Television, Talking Heads, and Richard Hell and the Voidoids. Many of these bands played songs that were fast, loud, and antisocial, a reaction to what the musicians perceived as rock's bloat and pretension. In the 1970s, the English discovered punk and presented their own, uglier version of the Ramones: the notorious Sex Pistols. The Pistols were the brainchild of Malcolm McLaren, a onetime fashion designer. For McLaren punk was not about music—he kicked a musician out of the band to make room for Sid Vicious, who could barely hold, much less play, his bass—but about tweaking moral sensibilities through bizarre dress, vulgarity, and other forms of confrontational "art."

Although the Velvets never sold many albums and the Pistols went down in a blaze after Sid Vicious killed himself, punk's influence on rock has been enormous. There is a famous adage in rock circles that while the Velvet Underground didn't sell many albums, everyone who bought one formed a band. Punk paved the way for a legion of English artists like Elvis Costello, Generation X, and the Cure, who were steeped in the punk culture's irony, sarcasm, and cynicism, as well as groups like Duran Duran, the Police, and Culture Club, whose musical sensibility was soft pop but whose attitude of shocking the public—remember the androgynous cross-dressing heroin addict Boy George?—was punk. It also inspired the anti-commercial independent scene that thrived in America in the 1980s and produced a host of bands like the late Kurt Cobain's Nirvana, whose 1991 breakthrough album *Nevermind* launched the neo-punk aesthetic into the orbit of the mainstream.


William Bramhall

Today, punk disciples like Pearl Jam, R.E.M., Rancid, and Green Day sell millions of albums, and punk fashion is seen everywhere from movies (*Seven*) to Burger King to fashion runways in Milan and Paris. Indeed, punk's confrontational sneer has become so commonplace that the guide claims "this may be the last moment in time when alternative rock can be summed up as a musical genre apart."

Not two pages after this dire pronouncement, *Spin* offers its first entry in the guide: ABBA, one of the largest-selling pop groups in history. Justifying the inclusion of the Swedish foursome responsible for cosmically vapid 70s tracks like "Dancing Queen" and "Waterloo," critic Barry Walters writes, "The fact that [ABBA] was able to [be popular] and remain innately strange, oddly detached from the sources it so obviously mastered, civilized to the nth degree but overflowing with operatic adult emotions that don't match the teen-beat sounds of kiddie-talk lyrics, heroes to grannies and gay men—is one of pop's greatest miracles."

Couldn't he have just said he liked the songs? Actually, ABBA's inclusion in the guide is a sign of

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how steeped in irony the alternative culture is. Popularity, in the guise of commercial success, means selling out, pure and simple. Therefore, the only success the alternative world approves of is the kitschy type, the kind that can be enjoyed with a knowing smirk. Tony Bennett in concert on MTV, anyone?

To Alternative Nation, music is like literature to politically correct college professors—not something to lose yourself in, but to consume at arm's length and with an eye on race, class, gender, and what's considered appropriate iconoclasm. Sure, it's fine to listen to ABBA—just as long as you're aware that the group was strange and appealed to gay men. This explains why Madonna's "Immaculate Collection," a greatest-hits package, ranks number 11 on the "Top 100 Alternative Albums" at the back of the guide. Madonna's clunky, forgettable dance tracks are here transformed into an "adventurous" sound, her lapsed Catholicism "delivering the rock 'n' roll answer to [Martin Scorsese's movie] *Mean Streets* that Bruce Springsteen and Billy Joel only promised." Lucky girl—if she had kept her top on and written some great songs, she never would have made the list.

This finger-in-the-eye-of-bourgeois-respectability stuff gets pretty tiring, and the irony is that the critics who think this attitude is the key to understanding rock 'n' roll have it all backwards. The finger in the eye came later; originally rock 'n' roll was merely the extension of its predecessors, inescapably part of the 20th-century tradition of pop music. In the remarkable book *Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in Popular Music*, critic Martha Bayles argues that the ethic of contempt in current popular music has nothing to do with the traditions that spawned rock 'n' roll. According to Bayles, 1950s rock 'n' roll was simply swing music under a different name, an obvious fact to anyone who's done the jitterbug to Benny Goodman, Louis Jordan, Lionel Hampton, Bill Haley, and Elvis at the same wedding.

Bayles claims that rock's current stature as envelope-pusher began when 60s groups like the Velvet Underground discovered "the anti-social, anti-art impulses of the European avant-garde." As a result, many rock 'n' roll groups today inspired by the Velvets are antagonistic towards the very things that former pop music giants lived for—expertise on your instrument, giving the audience what it wants, and making a few bucks. The punk Do It Yourself ethic dictates that anyone with two arms can play guitar; members of grunge group Pearl Jam wring their hands over their popularity, refusing to play crowd favorites in concert, and neo-punks Green Day and other groups are pilloried as sellouts for signing to a major label. Even R.E.M.'s Mike Stipe, lauded as a model of decency by the music press, balls up sheets of paper with his lyrics written on them and throws them at the audience—a gesture of profound contempt for fans who complain they can't understand the words when he sings.

LUCKY GIRL—IF MADONNA HAD KEPT HER TOP ON AND WRITTEN SOME GREAT SONGS, SHE NEVER WOULD HAVE MADE THE *SPIN* LIST OF TOP ALTERNATIVE ALBUMS.

These days the only groups who seem to care about pleasing the people—the imperative of pop musicians from Count Basie through Sinatra and the Beatles—are artists whose constituencies would ostensibly be the most receptive to grunge's and punk's confrontational message. Soul, blues, zydeco, and jazz are enjoyed mostly by working-class people, who, at least economically, have the most to complain about. But to these fans, music is a means of escape, or at least of collectively coping with emotional turmoil, not a vehicle for celebrating rage. The music highlights dance, showmanship, competence, and capitalism. (Rap strays from this formula by debasing its subject and the audience, which is why it made it into the guide.)

After reading the last page of the guide—on John Zorn, whose "recordings don't sound all that appealing [but are] often organized or conceived in a way that makes them far more fascinating than better-sounding [expletive] that emanates from a more banal source"—I felt liberated, free at last from the paralyzing irony, politics, and cliquish, cutthroat out-cooling that has become the sine qua non of contemporary rock 'n' roll.

This doesn't mean I'm abandoning pop music. The 60s gave us the pseudo-art of Velvet Underground and snotty sarcasm of Frank Zappa, but also Motown, the Beach Boys, and the Hollies. Modern grunge is still dishing up a steady diet of anger, debasement, and confrontation, but there are signs of life in artists like Van Morrison, Luther Allison, C.J. Chenier, and Eric Matthews.

And I can always fall back on the staggeringly rich American pop music tradition that gave the world Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Benny Goodman, and what Martha Bayles refers to as "the resilient, affirmative spirituality" of the blues. Now *that's* an alternative. ♦

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—Katharine Graham on "Herblock's Half-Century," *Washington Post*, Dec. 31, 1995

Parody

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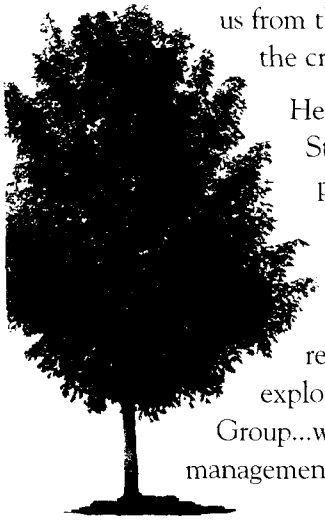

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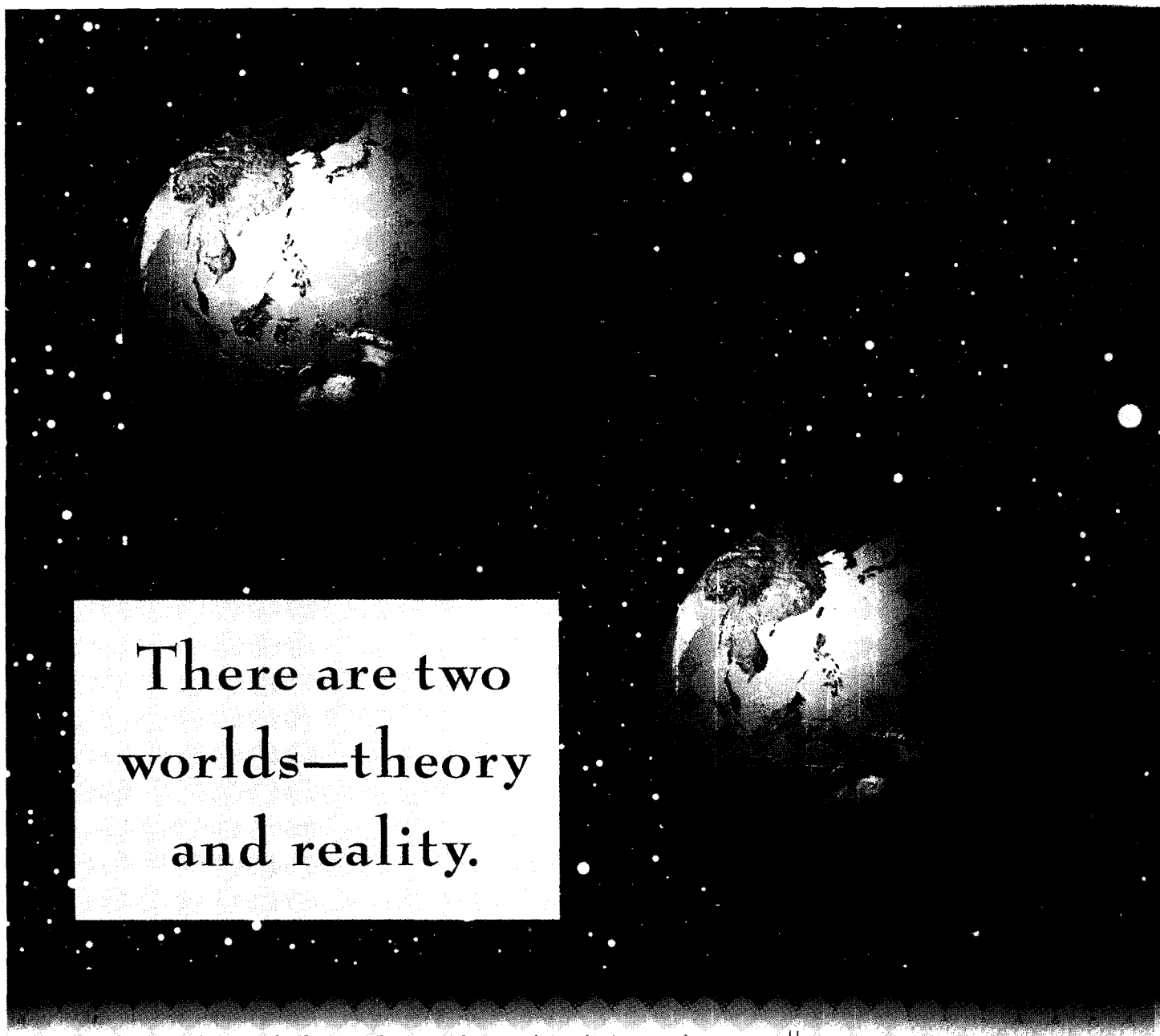

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